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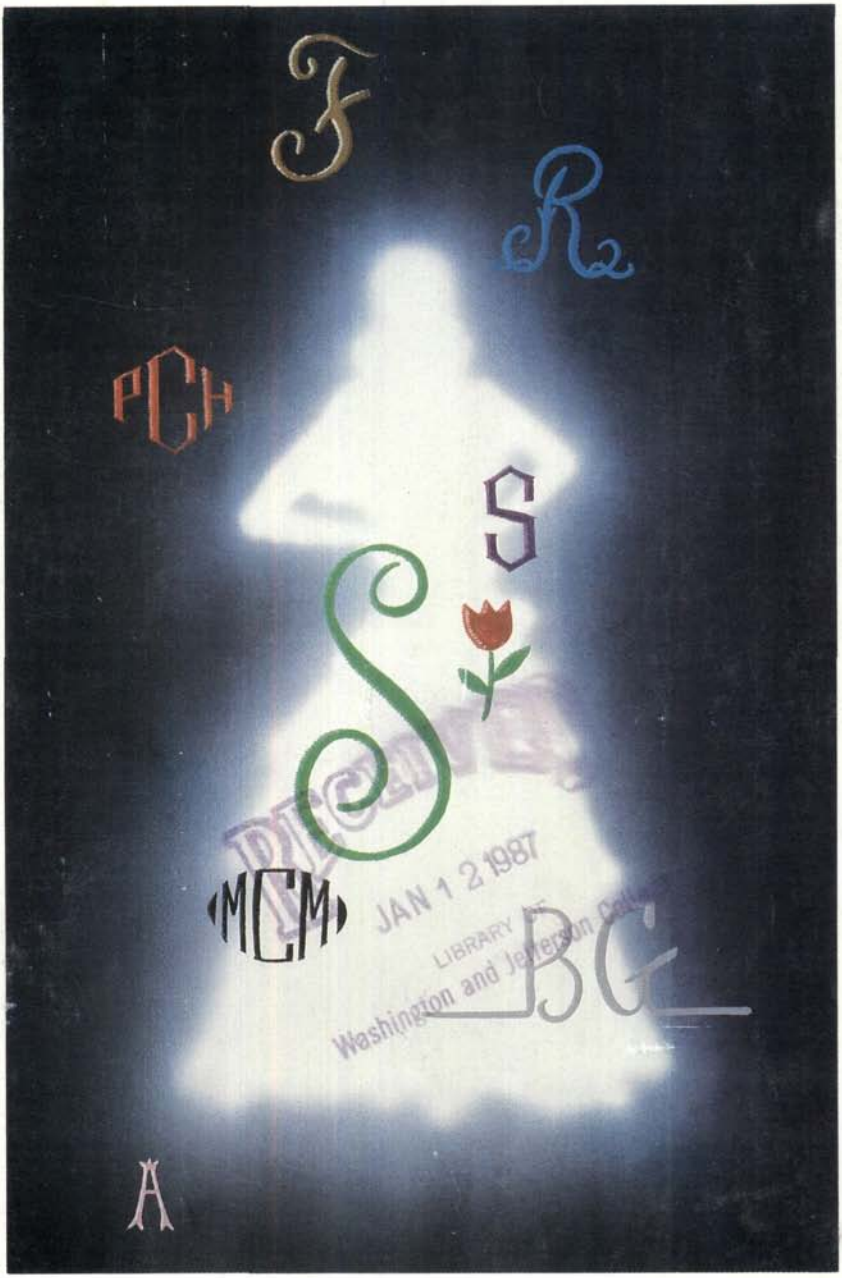
W. S. Merwin Fiction, Delmore Schwartz Poetry



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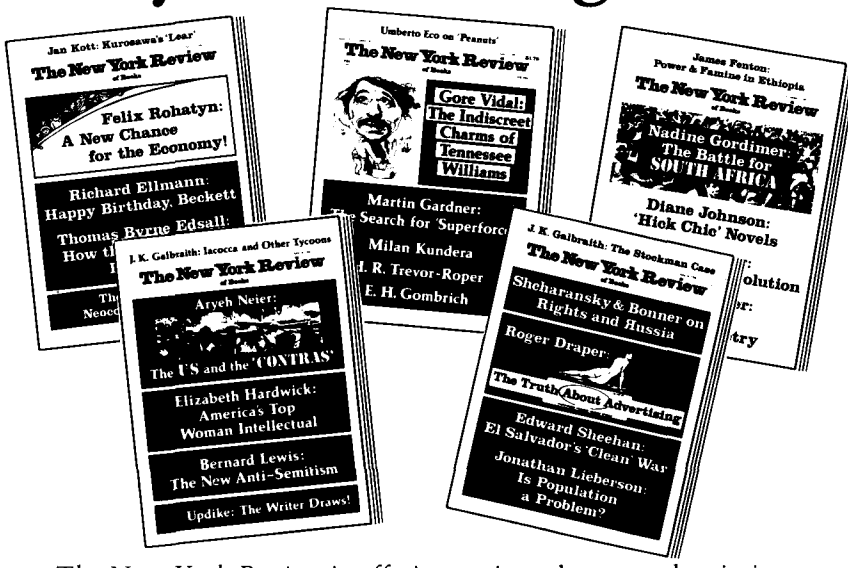
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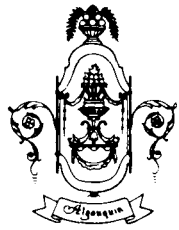


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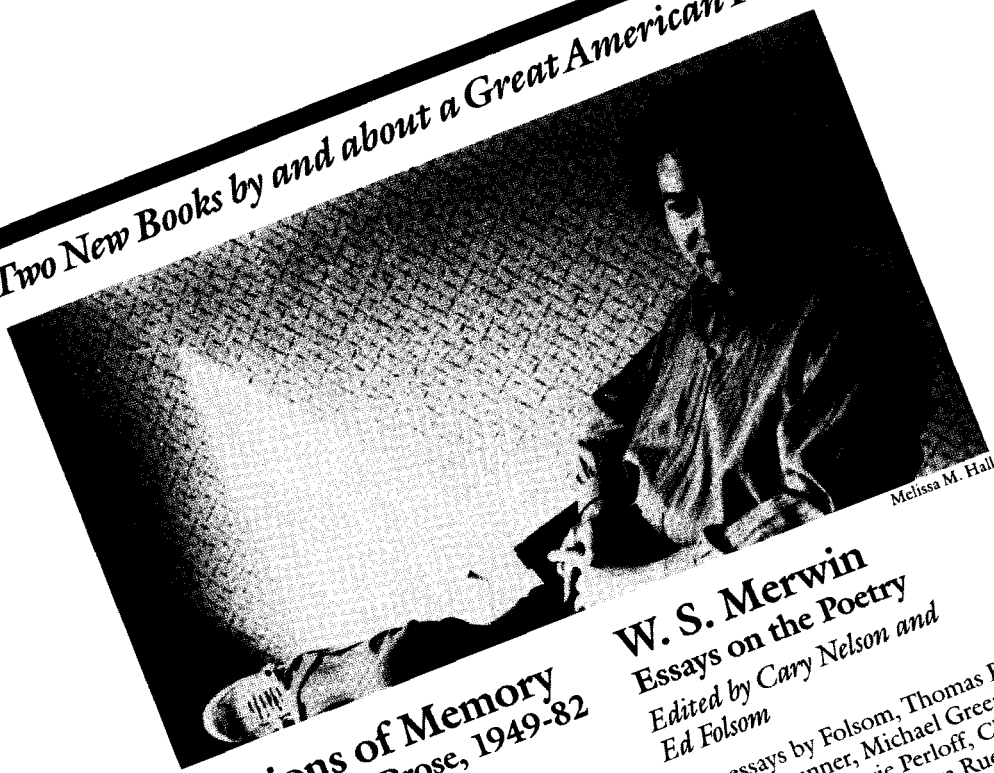


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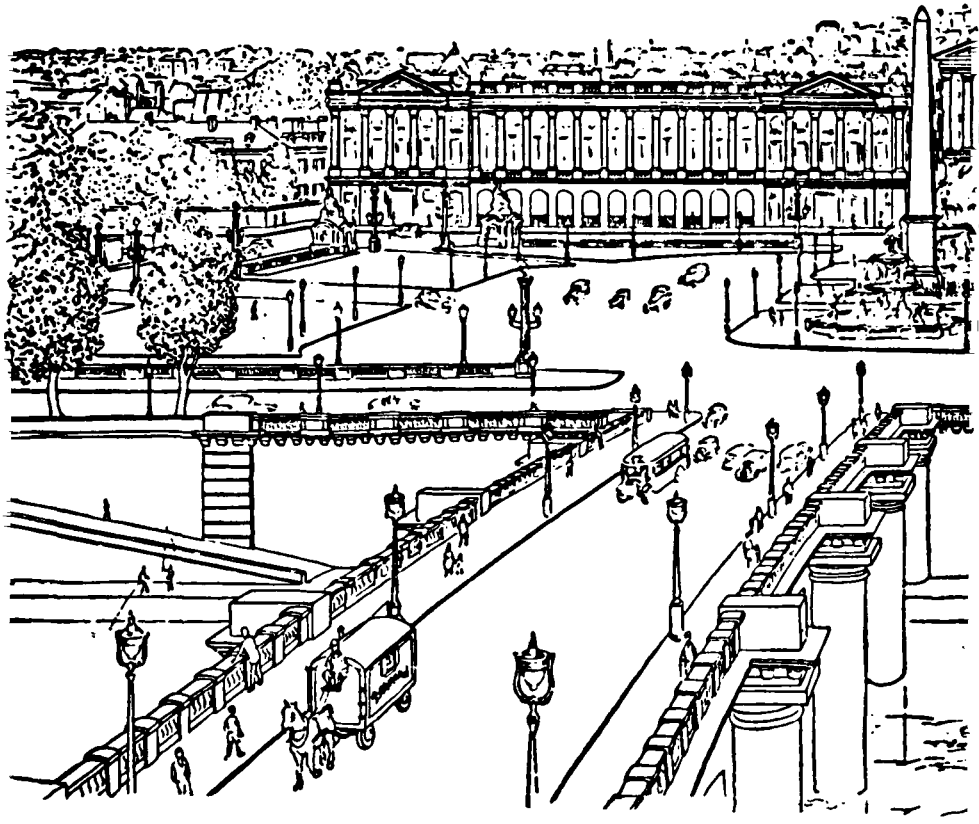

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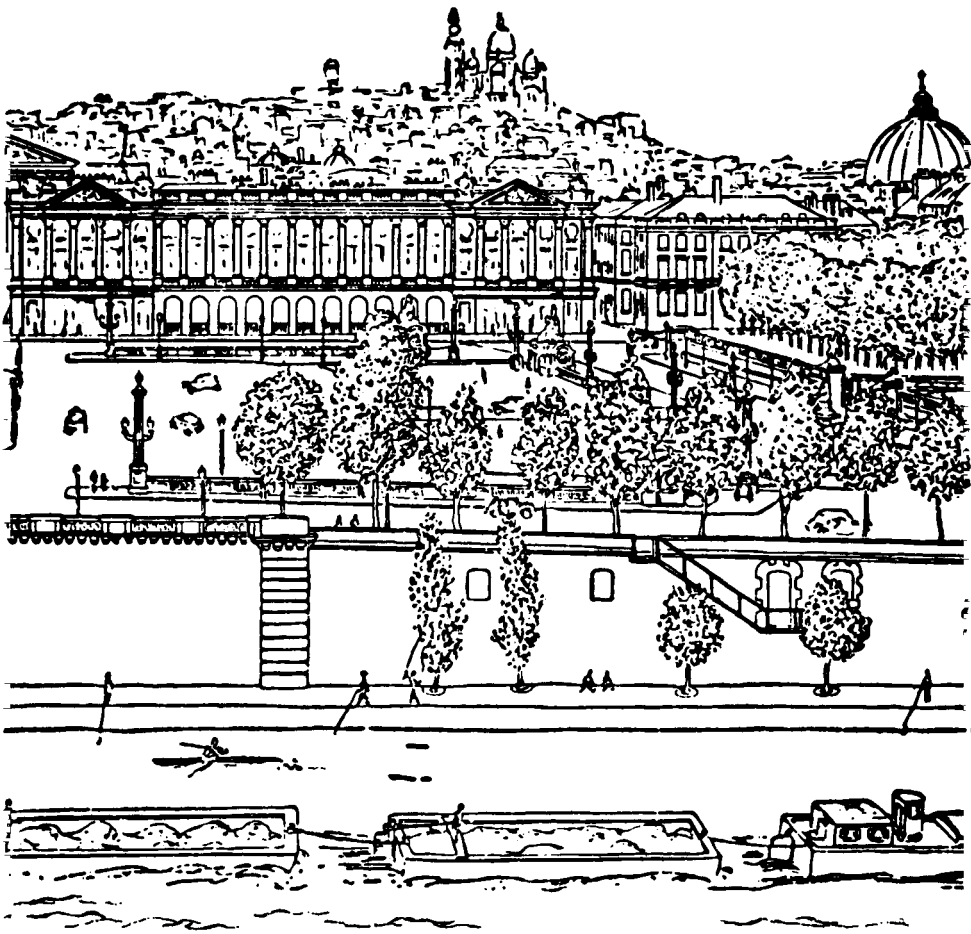

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# *Six Poems by Delmore Schwartz*

## Introduction

*These poems, which are drawn from a larger number of unpublished manuscripts and typescripts in the Delmore Schwartz papers at Yale University's Beinecke Library display the poet's styles both early and late in his writing career.*

*"Sonnet," dated 1938, is a good example of his earliest work, which took Eliot and Yeats as models. Compact, rhyming, and formal, the poems attempted to mythologize Schwartz, to dramatize history, and to pay homage to the world of culture.*

*The other five poems were written in the mid-to-late fifties, when his work had changed dramatically. Two were dated 1954 and 1958, though they did not appear in his 1959 volume of new and selected poems,* Summer Knowledge. *The later poems are modeled after Joyce and, especially, Walt Whitman, with their generosity, lists, Biblical sounds, and declarations. The poems are characterized by energy and delight. Generally they are written in much longer lines, do not rhyme, are full of puns and free associations, and have more relaxed syntax and apparent good humor.*

*Schwartz's late poetry has not received its due. For all their excesses, extravagant claims, and seemingly endless catalogues, Schwartz's late poems, at their best, are a poetry of pure feeling and a novelty in midcentury American poetry.*

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*—Robert Phillips*

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## The Maxims of Sisyphus

(*Sisyphus' Success*)

Although I was tenacious, I never learned
the wisdom and will of tenacity;
Although I was persistent, and praised for persistence,
At the first faint falling off of inspiration's desire
the black hood of despondency covered my face,
fell over it
To till and toil and delve and dig, dumb in the darkness
chinning and clutching, darkened and weakened
I never knew until . . . nor knew how the piddling puddling
persistent will is the perpetual way,
the royal real route to the richest fulfillment.

. . . Persistent, but faint of heart, passionate and yet apathetic,
How often I turned my face away,
How often avoided unpleasant imperfection,
squeamish and absolute, and did not run up against
the taboo abomination, but ran away and ran back.
Running away instead of running running through
How could I perceive how often success was won after
many repeated Sisyphean failures
(When I often had been drunken with the romance
and fortune of spontaneity, when often the more
the effort, the worse the denial or outcome or . . .
When all that I most wanted was near as my hands
and feet, and had been, ever. . . .

(10/29/54)

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## How Can He Possess

How can he possess
The dreams and extremes of hope and despair . . .
(which are named Death and Morning?)

He must wish to dance at everyone's wedding.
He must wish to be everyone and everything.
He must be a Trappist, but eloquent as Trotsky,

Chaste but a gigolo,
the Czar yet Figaro.

Hence how can he be anything but nothing or zero
If this *dramatis personae* is ever a necessity?

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## Sonnet

I follow thought and what the world announces
I lean to hear, and leaning too far over,
Fall, and babied by confusion, cover
Myself in drowse, too tired by such bounces.
But in sleep are dreams across zigzagging snow
Descending quietly and slow, like minutes,
And on this peace the soul again begins its
Rhetoric of desire, older than Jericho,
And rails once more, like birds of early morning
Urchinous on branches and like newsboys,
"Extra, this is the meaning of life,
Here is the real good, beyond all turning,"
Till night goes home, astonished by such cries,
I wake up, and, to feel superior, I laugh.

(1938)

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## The Power and Glory of Language

Lordly and mighty language—eagle of time and space,
Giving to the mind the possession and freedom of both,
Touring and traveling in the ancient whiteness and blueness,
Sailing in the winedark of Greece and olive green
  Mediterranean,
Seeking cinnamon and wisdom in the Orient's scriptures,
Harking to and holding the whistle of birds and lisping
Of infants and the joshing and jargon of boys, the squawk
And the yelp, the echo and the innuendo and belly-laugh,
Giggle, horse-laugh, titter, and snicker, containing
The midnight of meaning and the lightning of insight,
The small stars of the perception of white flowers
And falling flakes, the fingertip and the city, the continent
Of love, the first flush of Eros and the plunging delirium
(Which is a dying and a little death), her unbearable ecstasy
Began, the pulse and gong clamored and hammered,
She whimpered with pleasure, she sobbed in the procession
Of passion, she slid down the valley of the fury of joy
On skis which soared as she fell . . .

What have they called the little girl? Perdita, Judith, Marina?
The grace of language, which is the living ghost and holy spirit
Of joy (because it is unseen, it is gifted with wings,
and is small enough and powerful enough to be all things),
It is a bond and a meeting place
It is a currency which passes all borders
And proceeds through all nations,
It is given to all who take it
It is aristocratic as well as democratic.

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## The Sequel, the Conclusion, the Endlessness

For thus, since the body's death is quick, seems less,
Consoled or hidden by unconsciousness,
While every little death lies sprawling and awake
In the sleepless glade of consciousness,
Therefore the body's death seems the liberty
Of nothingness, the dream of every suicide,
Criminal, and tyrant, afraid of each little death,
Or sickened by the terror of new hope,
Or certain, again, that every death of any hope
Concludes all hope and makes the body's death
More desirable than the recurrent torment of the years
Of life with a dead heart and pathos instead of hope:
Or hope that hope may be reborn once more
Only to be disappointed as before:
This is the ignorant bigotry of all despair:
This is the Utopia of all suicide.

The final dream of liberty we believe
And suicides seek with certainty
Is also their first vision of reality:
If it is true, it is not because either fear
Or crime are key to profundity and aware,
Revealing the heart of reality and the heart's reality.
For if they were, how would it be possible to start
The games which begin the hope and end in the death of hope,
the body's death, and the death of the heart?

(9/12/58)

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## Poem: How Marvelous Man's Kind Is

*When it is very dark, we see the stars clearly.*

—Emerson

*The universe is a machine for the making of gods.*

—Bergson

How we marvel and must when most
Struggle to life and possess
That self or sense of the self
Which is either a hope or a myth
Shinnying the steeples of death
For the pigskin or fleece of pride!

If this passion did not exist
The captains and killers of wars
Surely would not persist
To their stone and pose;
And none would follow his dream
To the extremes of living and death:
Their soldiers, dreamstruck, enlist
Because they believe in a myth!

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How we live! How we live by this!
Citizens of fantasy!
Pennants above an abyss
Limp, or blown stupidly.
As though the dream be true
Tomorrow in the country of the blue.

Now before we reach that shore
We are too sure or too unsure,
Fearing lunatic kings, or once more
Lunatics of intuitive doubt
—Caligula or Descartes!—
Till the truth of death do us part
From the stories and theatres of the heart.

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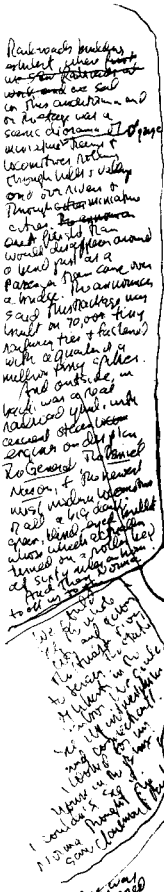

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fourteen lane highways, real little cars moving on them at different speeds, the center lanes for the higer speeds, the lanes on the edge for the lower; and this was all regulated by radio controls, the drivers didnt even do the driving! Higways and HOrizons, was the name of this tinny world it showed how everything could be planned, people lived in these modern streamlined curvilinear buildings, each of them accomodating the populationof a small town and holding all the things schools, food stores and laundries and movies and so on, that they might need , just as if 174th Street and all the neighborhood around was packed into one giant building. And we passed bridges and streams, and electrified farms and airports which brought up airliners on elevators from underground hangars. And there werefactories with lights and smoke, and lakes and forests and mountains, and it was all real, which is to say built to scale, the forests had real tiny trees, and the water in the lakes was real, and around it all we went, at different levels, seeing everything in more and more detail, thousands of tiny cars zipping right along on their tracks as if carrying their small beings about their business. And out in the coutry side were these tiny houses with people sitting in them and reading the paper and and listening to the radio. In the cities of the future, pedestrian streets connected the buildings and the highways wer sunken on tracks below them, no one would get run over in a futuristic world like this, everything made sense, people didnt have to travel except to see the parklands, the wilderness areas, everything else, their schools, their jobs were right where they lived. I was very impressed: All the small moving parts, all the lights and shadows, the animation as if I was looking at the largest most complicated toy ever made. And there was music the announcer who told us about all these wonderful things, these raindrop cars, these airconditioned cities. This is what really thrilled me: my delight in small things, bginging the world down to a scale so that you could see whole, and be confirmed in your own secret feeling of Gargantua.

Ah what a day this was. We ran out when the show was over and were ready to stand on line to see it all over again. Norma laughed and understanding what about it had so fascinated us, its tinyness, took us to the consolidated Edison exhibit, which gave us the same feelings because it was a diaorama of the entire city of New York, showing the life in the city from morning till night, the great stone skyscrapess, the cars and busses in the street, the subways and elevated trains, all of it working, all of it spraking with life, and when afternoon came, there was even a thunderstorm, and all the lights of the city came up to deal with the darkness.

Everywhere atheWorld' Fair the world was reduced to manageable size by the cunning and ingenuity of the builders and engineers. But anything that distorted the scale of things delighted me. In the Public Health building there was an exhibit showing the functions of different parts of the body, each of them portrayed in an enormous model. An enormous ear, or nose, with their canals and valves and bone marrow, big pink plastic things, bigger than I was. And then an enormous man in his entirety, made of plexiglass I suppose, with all his giant organs visible, but no penis, a mistake in rperesnetation about which I said nothing to Betsy and Norma, thinking it was not polite. And everywhere outside were enormous statues of naked men and women in various poses, wrestling dogs, or swimming with dolphins or carrying farm tools. All these statues were made of stone, and you could see the muscles in their legs, or arms, and the ribs and spinal columns, you you count the bones, the stood or lay about in pools or atop pylons or rose up from shoubbery. Some of them were pressed into the sides of buildings, so only the front halves of them showed, sculputres of concrete pressed in like sandmolds. I was made lightheaded by the

*A manuscript page from E. L. Doctorow's novel* World's Fair.

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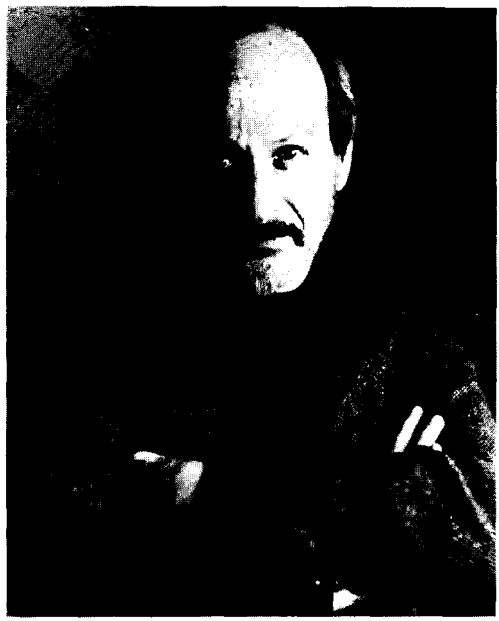

# The Art of Fiction
# E. L. Doctorow

*This interview on the craft of writing with E. L. Doctorow is one of the first in this series conducted in public—which it was, under the auspices of The Poetry Center in the main auditorium of New York City's famed cultural spa, The 92nd Street YMHA. An audience of about five hundred was on hand. After a short introduction Doctorow and his interviewer came out and sat facing each other in two chairs at center stage. The audience was invited to ask questions at the end of the formal interview. Actually, the first question from the*

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*floor suggested that the public forum might* not *be the best place for such an interview. A befuddled lady in the fifth row asked, "What made you write about the firestorm in Dresden?" With the patience of one who has taught at a number of institutions (Sarah Lawrence, Princeton, Yale Drama School, and New York University, among others) Doctorow informed his questioner politely that she probably had Kurt Vonnegut's* Slaughterhouse-Five *in mind, and that the Dresden firestorm had been done "so beautifully" there was little reason for anyone else to try. After the flurry caused by this exchange had died down, the questions from the audience were more germane. They are included with their answers at the end of this interview.*

*A word about Doctorow: born in New York City, he grew up in the Bronx. At Kenyon College (from which he graduated in 1952) he studied under the poet critic John Crowe Ransom. He attended graduate school at Columbia University for a year, where he met his wife, Helen, and afterwrd spent two years in the U.S. Army in Germany (1953–55). Before his literary career started, he worked as a reservations clerk at LaGuardia Airport, and then as a reader for a motion-picture company. He reported to the New York* Times *of this latter experience: "I was reading a book a day and writing a synopsis. It's actually not a bad apprenticeship for a writer. You can't help but develop an editorial capability, doing that kind of work on a daily basis. It's always good to see how much bad stuff is published. It's very encouraging."*

*His first two novels were* Welcome to Hard Times *(1960) and* Big as Life *(1966) — the first a western, the second a science fiction, both engendered from Doctorow's desire, at that stage, to write seriously in "disreputable genres." During this time he took an editorial position at the New American Library (1959–64), moving from associate to senior editor. In 1964 he became editor-in-chief of the Dial Press, going on to become its publisher. Among his charges during his editorial years were James Baldwin, Thomas Berger, Vance Bourjaily, William Kennedy, and Norman Mailer.*

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*With* The Book of Daniel, *published in 1971, Doctorow gave up his publishing career and devoted himself entirely to writing books, all of which have either been nominated for, or won, the most prestigious literary awards offered in this country. These novels have included* Ragtime *(1975),* Loon Lake *(1980),* Lives of the Poets *(1984), and his most recent,* World's Fair, *which won the 1986 American Book Award for fiction. He has written a play,* Drinks Before Dinner, *which was produced in 1978 by Joseph Papp. At present Doctorow lives with his wife in New Rochelle and Sag Harbor, New York. They have three children.*

*At first meeting, Doctorow gives the impression of being somewhat retiring in manner. Yet, though his voice is soft, it is distinctive and demands attention. His expression is perhaps quizzical (described by the* Times *as "elfin") yet it is instantly apparent that a great deal of thought has been put into what he is about to say. The fact that a large audience was listening during the interview seemed not to discomfit him in the slightest.*

INTERVIEWER

You once told me that the most difficult thing for a writer to write was a simple household note to someone coming to collect the laundry, or instructions to a cook.

E. L. DOCTOROW

What I was thinking of was a note I had to write to the teacher when one of my children missed a day of school. It was my daughter, Caroline, who was then in the second or third grade. I was having my breakfast one morning when she appeared with her lunch box, her rain slicker, and everything, and she said, "I need an absence note for the teacher and the bus is coming in a few minutes." She gave me a pad and a pencil; even as a child she was very thoughtful. So I wrote down the date and I started, "Dear Mrs. So and So, my daughter Caroline . . ." and then I thought, No, that's not right, obvi-

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ously it's my daughter Caroline. I tore that sheet off, and started again. "Yesterday, my child . . ." No, that wasn't right either. Too much like a deposition. This went on until I heard a horn blowing outside. The child was in a state of panic. There was a pile of crumpled pages on the floor, and my wife was saying, "I can't believe this. I can't believe this." She took the pad and pencil and dashed something off. I had been trying to write the perfect absence note. It was a very illuminating experience. Writing is immensely difficult. The short forms especially.

INTERVIEWER

How much tinkering do you actually do when you get down to nonhousehold work—a novel, say?

DOCTOROW

I don't think anything I've written has been done in under six or eight drafts. Usually it takes me a few years to write a book. *World's Fair* was an exception. It seemed to be a particularly fluent book as it came. I did it in seven months. I think what happened in that case is that God gave me a bonus book.

INTERVIEWER

Did you feel as though He were speaking to you as you wrote things down?

DOCTOROW

No, no. I imagine He just decided, Well, this one's been paying his dues, so let's give him a bonus book. But Faulkner wrote *As I Lay Dying* in six weeks. Stendhal wrote *Charterhouse of Parma* in twelve days. That's proof God spoke to them—if proof is needed. Twelve days! If it wasn't God it was crass exhibitionism.

INTERVIEWER

In *World's Fair* you make a very interesting shift—writing from the points of view of Rose and Donald and Aunt Frances

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and then the protagonist. So you have several voices, really. Is it difficult to shift from one to the other?

DOCTOROW

In the past few years I've been interested in the work of the so-called oral historians. The statements people make about their own lives to oral historians have a certain form which I think I have figured out. Now the basic convention of *World's Fair* is that it is memoir. That is what it pretends to be in the voice of the protagonist. My idea was to lend that voice verisimilitude by dropping in some oral-historic statements by other members of the family. I composed these to read as if they were spoken into a tape recorder. You always try to find ways to break down the distinction between fiction and actuality. Another advantage of those voiced intrusions is to provide a kind of beat or a caesura in the ongoing narrative. I thought that was a good thing to do.

INTERVIEWER

So there is an ongoing change and shift in the forms of voice.

DOCTOROW

To me the more interesting change has to do with the voice of the major narrator, the protagonist, Edgar, who as he recalls more and more of his childhood, as he passes from infancy to youth, takes on the voice of an articulate child. The diction changes, the tone changes, as if Edgar is gradually possessed by his memory. So there's a kind of two-voiced effect, I think, the man recalling, but in the boy's higher pitch. I really like that. I didn't know I was going to do that.

INTERVIEWER

You didn't? Well, how calculated is all this?

DOCTOROW

Do you mind if I loosen my tie?

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INTERVIEWER

Allowable.

DOCTOROW

It's not calculated at all. It never has been. One of the things I had to learn as a writer was to trust the act of writing. To put myself in the position of writing to find out what I was writing. I did that with *World's Fair*, as with all of them. The inventions of the book come as discoveries. At a certain point, of course, you figure out what your premises are and what you're doing. But certainly, with the beginnings of the work, you really don't know what's going to happen.

INTERVIEWER

What comes first? Is it a character? You say a premise. What does that mean? Is it a theme?

DOCTOROW

Well, it can be anything. It can be a voice, an image; it can be a deep moment of personal desperation. For instance, with *Ragtime* I was so desperate to write something, I was facing the wall of my study in my house in New Rochelle and so I started to write about the wall. That's the kind of day we sometimes have, as writers. Then I wrote about the house that was attached to the wall. It was built in 1906, you see, so I thought about the era and what Broadview Avenue looked like then: trolley cars ran along the avenue down at the bottom of the hill; people wore white clothes in the summer to stay cool. Teddy Roosevelt was President. One thing led to another and that's the way that book began, through desperation to those few images. With *Loon Lake*, in contrast, it was just a very strong sense of place, a heightened emotion when I found myself in the Adirondacks after many many years of being away . . . and all this came to a point when I saw a sign, a road sign: Loon Lake. So it can be anything.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have any idea how a project is going to end?

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DOCTOROW

Not at that point, no. It's not a terribly rational way to work. It's hard to explain. I have found one explanation that seems to satisfy people. I tell them it's like driving a car at night. You never see further than your headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way.

INTERVIEWER

How many times do you come to a dead end?

DOCTOROW

Well if it's a dead end, there's no book. That happens too. You start again. But if you're truly underway you may wander into culverts, through fences into fields, and so on. When you're off the road you don't always know it immediately. If you feel a bump on page one hundred, it may be you went off on page fifty. So you have to trace your way back, you see. It sounds like a hazardous way of working—and it is—but there is one terrific advantage to it: each book tends to have its own identity rather than the author's. It speaks from itself rather than you. Each book is unlike the others because you are not bringing the same voice to every book. I think that keeps you alive as a writer. I've just read the latest Ernest Hemingway publication, *The Garden of Eden*—it's actually a fragment of a work he never completed—and in this as in the others he spoke with the Hemingway voice. He applied the same strategies to every book, strategies as it happens that he came upon and invented quite early on in his career. They were his triumph in the early days. But by the last decade or two of his working life they trapped him, restricted him, and defeated him. He was always Hemingway writing, you see. Of course at his best that wasn't such a bad thing, was it? But if we're speaking of entry to the larger mind, his was not the way to find it.

INTERVIEWER

Does that change you at all? The voice, for example, in *Loon*

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*Lake* is very different from the voice in *Ragtime.* Do you change as a character yourself?

DOCTOROW

Well, you do participate, I suppose, as an actor does in a role. As the roles change, the actor's voice and deportment, his physique, even his makeup, everything changes.

INTERVIEWER

But sitting around the house you don't behave like Joe of Paterson, for example, the hobo in *Loon Lake.*

DOCTOROW

Well, how do you know?

INTERVIEWER

I don't know!

DOCTOROW

Writing is a socially acceptable form of schizophrenia. You can get away with an awful lot. One of my children once said—it was a terrible truth, too, and, of course, it had to be a young child who said this: "Dad is always hiding in his book."

INTERVIEWER

But aren't you very evident in your books? I mean, *Lives of the Poets*, who is that?

DOCTOROW

I don't know. It's somebody who might be me. Or part of me. Certainly in the past two books, I've used my own memory as a resource. But that does not mean I've written autobiographically. I recognize Jonathan, the narrator of *Lives of the Poets*, as a character, but he is not me. Not the fellow I see in the mirror. In *World's Fair* I gave the young hero my name, Edgar, but I don't think he's me either. You use found

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materials as you use anything else from your own life. Books are acts of composition. You compose them. You make music. The music is called fiction.

INTERVIEWER

Is that to suggest that *Ragtime*, for example, with all those extraordinary historical reminiscences and facts is in fact stretched truth?

DOCTOROW

Oh no, not stretched: the appropriate word is *discovered* or *revealed*. Everything in that book is absolutely true.

INTERVIEWER

Where did you ever find out, for example, that Theodore Dreiser, after *Sister Carrie* was published, was so upset that he rented a room and spent a great deal of time realigning a chair? That's an extraordinary detail.

DOCTOROW

I know a lot about the sufferings of writers. It's a subject that interests me. Dreiser wrote this magnificent novel. It was published in 1900; it was then and is still the best first novel ever written by an American. It's an amazing work. He found a voice, speaking of voice, for that book, of the wise septuagenarian. I don't know how he found it—he was twenty-eight when he began writing. Nevertheless it is the voice of a world-weary man who has seen it all. The book was a magnificent achievement but the publisher, Doubleday didn't like it, they were afraid of it. So they buried it. And naturally it did nothing; I think it sold four copies. I would go crazy too in that situation. Dreiser rented a furnished room in Brooklyn. He put a chair in the middle of this room and sat in it. The chair didn't seem to be in the right position so he turned it a few degrees, and he sat in it again. Still it was not right. He kept turning the chair around and around, trying to align it to what—trying to correct his own relation to the universe? He

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never could do it, so he kept going around in circles and circles. He did that for quite a while, and ended up in a sanitarium in Westchester, in White Plains. But the trip to the sanitarium didn't interest me. Only the man turning the chair. So that's where Dreiser is in *Ragtime*, in that room, trying forever to align himself.

INTERVIEWER

For describing J. P. Morgan, for an example, did you spend a great deal of time in libraries?

DOCTOROW

The main research for Morgan was looking at the great photograph of him by Edward Steichen.

INTERVIEWER

That's all?

DOCTOROW

Well, I needed the names of the various companies he took over, railroads and so on, so I suppose I must have looked that up. But my research is idiosyncratic. Very often in *Ragtime* it involved finding a responsible source for the lie I was about to create, and discovering that it was not a lie, which is to say someone else had thought of it first.

INTERVIEWER

Isn't there an enormous temptation as a fiction writer to take scenes out of history, since you do rely on that so much, and fiddle with them just a little bit?

DOCTOROW

Well, it's nothing new, you know. I myself like the way Shakespeare fiddles with history. And Tolstoy. In this country we tend to be naive about history. We think it's Newton's perfect mechanical universe, out there predictably for everyone to see and set their watches by. But it's more like curved space, and infinitely compressible and expandable time. It's constant

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sub-atomic chaos. When President Reagan says the Nazi S.S. were as much victims as the Jews they murdered—wouldn't you call that fiddling? Or the Japanese educators who've been rewriting their textbooks to eliminate the embarrassing facts of their invasion of China, the atrocities they committed in Manchuria in 1937? Orwell told us about this. History is a battlefield. It's constantly being fought over because the past controls the present. History is the present. That's why every generation writes it anew. But what most people think of as history is its end product, myth. So to be irreverent to myth, to play with it, let in some light and air, to try to combust it back into history, is to risk being seen as someone who distorts truth. I meant it when I said everything in *Ragtime* is true. It is as true as I could make it. I think my vision of J. P. Morgan, for instance, is more accurate to the soul of that man than his authorized biography. . . . Actually, if you want a confession, Morgan never existed. Morgan, Emma Goldman, Henry Ford, Evelyn Nesbit. All of them are made up. The historical characters in the book are Mother, Father, Tateh, The Little Boy, The Little Girl.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have a reader in mind as you write?

DOCTOROW

No, it's just a matter of being in language, of living in the sentences. With *The Book of Daniel*, for example, I obviously had an idea I thought I could do something with. But beyond that I couldn't have had any reader in mind, because I didn't even know what I was doing for the first several months. In fact, with Daniel I wrote a hundred and fifty pages and threw them away because they were so bad. The realization that I was doing a really bad book created the desperation that allowed me to find its true voice. I sat down rather recklessly and started to type something almost in mockery of my pretensions as a writer—and it turned out to be the first page of *The Book of Daniel*. What I had figured out in that tormented way was that Daniel should write the book, not me. Once I had

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his voice I was able to go on. That's the kind of struggle writing is. There's no room for a reader in your mind: you don't think of anything but the language you're in. Your mind is the language of the book.

INTERVIEWER

When did you come by this? When did you get into the language, as you put it. At college? You speak of Kenyon as a place where people think about writing the way they think about football at Ohio State.

DOCTOROW

What I actually said was that Kenyon was a place where we did literary criticism the way they played football at Ohio State. We did textual criticism. I studied poetry with John Crowe Ransom. I could write twenty-page papers on an eight-line lyric of Wordsworth. Of course it was invaluable training. You learned the powers of precision of the English language. The effect, for instance, of juxtaposing Latinate and Anglo-Saxon words. But criticism is a different conduct of the brain. That kind of analytical action of the mind is not the way you work when you write. You bring things together, you synthesize, you connect things that have had no previous connection when you write. So all in all as valuable as my training was, it took me through language in the wrong direction. It cost me a few years of writing time to recover my ignorance, the way I felt about writing as a child. I really started to think of myself as a writer when I was about nine.

INTERVIEWER

At nine? How did this feeling manifest itself?

DOCTOROW

Whenever I read anything I seemed to identify as much with the act of composition as with the story. I seemed to have two minds: I would love the story and want to know what happened next, but at the same time I would somehow be aware

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of what was being done on the page. I identified myself as a kind of younger brother of the writer. I was on hand to help him figure things out. So you see I didn't actually have to write a thing because the act of reading was my writing. I thought of myself as a writer for years before I got around to writing anything. It's not a bad way to begin. It's to blur that distinction between reader and writer. If you think about it, any book that you pick up as a reader, if it's good, is a printed circuit for your own life to flow through—so when you read a book you are engaged in the events of the mind of the writer. You are bringing your creative faculties into sync. You're imagining the words, the sounds of the words, and you're thinking of the various characters in terms of people you've known—not in terms of the writer's experience but your own. So it's very hard to make any distinction between reader and writer at this ontological level. As a child I somehow drifted into this region where you are both reader and writer: I declared to myself that I was the writer. I wrote a lot of good books. I wrote *Captain Blood* by Raphael Sabatini. That was one of my better efforts.

INTERVIEWER

It's amazing how many people have been affected by *Captain Blood*—Norman Mailer talks at length about it.

DOCTOROW

Does he really? I'm flattered. Did he ever read *Smoky* by Will James? That was one of my best.

INTERVIEWER

Does this twin-barreled construction mean that you are constantly an observer? That is, do you spend your day noticing things and saying to yourself, "Ah, that will work in a book"?

DOCTOROW

No, not at all. I don't think of myself as an observer. I feel things and have to work back from my feelings, my intuitions,

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to what must have caused them. I'm like most people: I don't usually understand what's happening to me while it's happening. I have to reconstruct it later, like a detective.

INTERVIEWER

But I mean if you went to a dinner party one night and there was an extraordinary argument between a husband and wife, would that not be something you would store away?

DOCTOROW

Well I might store it away. Of course, I might have walked out of the room first. You do see things. But I'm trying to say you can't turn around and move too quickly on them. As a matter of fact, anything that you want to use too quickly is suspect. You need time. I had heard a story, for instance, that a housekeeper in a suburb in New Jersey had secretly had a child and abandoned the child in the garden of another home in the neighborhood—swaddled the newborn infant and buried it in the garden bed. The child was discovered alive and the woman was found out—a very sad story. Well, about twenty years after I heard it I gave it to Sarah to do in *Ragtime*, a novel set in the 1900s in New Rochelle. That's the way it works. You collect all these things without knowing really what if anything you're going to do with them—old rags and scraps.

INTERVIEWER

How much experience do you think a writer should have? Would you ever suggest journalism, for example, as a career to begin with? Or send a writer to a war, or whatever.

DOCTOROW

You seem to think the writer has a choice—whether to work here or there or run off to a war. Maybe it's an American middle-class question, because in most places writers don't have a choice. If they grow up in the *barrio*, or get sent to the *gulag*, their experience is given to them whether they want it or not. Even here we respond to what's given: I seem to be of a generation that has somehow missed the crucial collective ex-

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periences of our time. I was too young to understand the Depression or fight in World War II. But I was past draft age for Vietnam. I've always been a loner. Perhaps for that reason I subscribe to what Henry James tries to indicate when he gives that wonderful example of a young woman who has led a sheltered life walking along beside an army barracks and hearing a snatch of soldier's conversation coming through the window. On the basis of that, said James, if she's a novelist she's capable of going home and writing a perfectly accurate novel about army life. I've always subscribed to that idea. We're supposed to be able to get into other skins. We're supposed to be able to render experiences not our own and warrant times and places we haven't seen. That's one justification for art, isn't it—to distribute the suffering? Writing teachers invariably tell students, Write about what you know. That's, of course, what you have to do, but on the other hand, how do you know what you know until you've written it? Writing is knowing. What did Kafka know? The insurance business? So that kind of advice is foolish, because it presumes that you have to go out to a war to be able to do war. Well, some do and some don't. I've had very little experience in my life. In fact, I try to avoid experience if I can. Most experience is bad.

INTERVIEWER

Could you describe the genesis of *Loon Lake*? A poem runs through the book.

DOCTOROW

What you call the poem was the very first writing I did on that book. I never thought of it as a poem, I thought of it as lines that just didn't happen to go all the way across the page. I broke the lines according to the rhythm in which they could be read aloud. I didn't know it at the time, but I was writing something to be read aloud—I think because I liked the sound of the two words together—loon lake. I had these opening images of a private railroad train on a single track at night going up through the Adirondacks with a bunch of gangsters on board, and a beautiful girl standing, naked, holding a white

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dress up in front of a mirror to see if she should put it on. I didn't know where these gangsters came from. I knew where they were going—to this rich man's camp. Many years ago the very wealthy discovered the wilderness in the American eastern mountains. They built these extraordinary camps—C W Post, Harriman, Morgan—they made the wilderness their personal luxury. So I imagined a camp like this, with these gangsters, these lowdown people going up there on a private railroad train. That's what got me started. I published this material in the *Kenyon Review*, but I wasn't through. I kept thinking about the images and wondering where they'd come from. The time was in the 1930s, really the last era a man would have had his own railroad car, as some people today have their own jetliners. There was a Depression then, so the person to see this amazing train was obviously a hobo, a tramp. So then I had my character, Joe, out there in this chill, this darkness, seeing the headlamp of the engine coming round the bend and blinding him, and then as the train goes by seeing these people at green baize tables being served drinks and this girl standing in a bedroom compartment holding the dress. And at dawn he follows the track in the direction the train has gone. And he's off and running and so am I.

INTERVIEWER

Given this method of yours, how do you know when to stop?

DOCTOROW

As the book goes on it becomes inevitable. Your choices narrow, the thing picks up speed. And there's the exhilaration of a free ride—like a downhill ski run. You know before you get there what the last scene is. Sometimes what the last line is. But even if none of that happens, even if you find yourself at the end before you expected to, a kind of joy breaks over you, spills out of your eyes. And you realize you've finished. And then you want to be sure, you see. You need confirmation. You ask somebody you love to read it and see if it works. I remember when I finished *The Book of Daniel.* We were living in a house on the beach in Southern California. One of those

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houses with sliding glass doors for windows. I asked my wife if she would read the manuscript. She said she would be pleased to. And I left her sitting and reading with the sun coming through those big windows, and I went for a walk on the beach. It was a Sunday and the beach was crowded; they really use their beaches in California, every inch of them. Back toward the road were the volleyball players and the kite flyers. Boys throwing footballs or frisbees. Then the sunbathers, the children with their sandpails, the families. Then the runners splashing along at the edge of the surf. Or the people looking for little shells in the tide pools in the rocks. Then the swimmers. Beyond them the surfers in their wet suits waiting on their boards. Further out snorkelers' flags bobbing in the water. Out past the buoys the water skiers tearing along. Or rising into the air in their parachutes. And beyond that sailboats, flotillas of them, to the horizon. And all in this light. It was like a Brueghel, a Southern Californian Brueghel. I walked for several hours and thought about my book, and worried in my mind, in that California light worrying about this dark book, very much a New York City book. Was it done? Was it any good? And I came back to the house in the late afternoon, the house in shadows now, and there was Helen sitting in the same chair and the manuscript was all piled upside down on the table and she couldn't speak; she was crying, there were these enormous tears running down her cheeks, and it was the most incredible moment—never before had I known such happiness.

INTERVIEWER

How much confidence do you have when you finish? I would guess a wife's tears would help.

DOCTOROW

Well, at that point you've made an extraordinary investment of time and emotion, and you're just grateful to be there. Then the rest of the world rushes in, everything you've been holding off: your mind becomes ordinary. You worry if anyone's going to buy the book; if your publisher is going to

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publish it properly; you fret about the jacket, the typography, and the copyright, that it be correctly drawn; you worry about everything. But no matter what kind of reaction the book receives, whether people like the book or don't like it, nothing comes up to the experience of writing the book. That's what drives you back.

INTERVIEW

How much time a day do you spend on this pleasure?

DOCTOROW

I would say I'm at work six hours a day, although the actual writing might take fifteen minutes or an hour, or three hours. You never know what kind of a day it's going to be; you just want to do whatever you set out to do. I type single space, to get as much of the landscape of the book as possible on one page. So if I do a single-space page with small margins, that's about six hundred words. If I do one page I'm very happy; that's my day's work. If I do two, that's extraordinary. But there's always a danger to doing two, which is you can't come up with anything the next day.

INTERVIEWER

What are the destroyers of this pleasure? Not for you, necessarily, but for writers? I remember we had a dinner once with John Irving and we started talking about how alcohol had diminished so many American writers.

DOCTOROW

A writer's life is so hazardous that anything he does is bad for him. Anything that happens to him is bad: failure's bad, success is bad; impoverishment is bad, money is very very bad. Nothing good can happen.

INTERVIEWER

Except the act of writing itself.

DOCTOROW

Except the act of writing. So if he shoots birds and animals

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and anything else he can find, you've got to give him that. And if he/she drinks, you give him/her that too, unless the work is affected. For all of us, there's an intimate connection between the struggle to write and the ability to survive on a daily basis as a human being. So we have a high rate of self-destruction. Do we mean to punish ourselves for writing? For the transgression? I don't know.

INTERVIEWER

But this is not applicable in your own case, obviously.

DOCTOROW

Well, time will tell. I have a few vices, but one of them is moderation.

INTERVIEWER

Do you enjoy the company of other writers?

DOCTOROW

Yes, when they're my friends.

INTERVIEWER

Does anybody see anything you've written until it's finished?

DOCTOROW

Usually nobody sees anything until at least a draft is done. Sometimes I will read from it in public just to see how it sounds. To get a feeling back from the audience. But I tend to clutch it to myself as long as possible.

INTERVIEWER

You were an editor for a long time, weren't you? What is the relationship between that and the craft of writing?

DOCTOROW

Editing taught me how to break books down and put them back together. You learn values—the value of tension, of keeping tension on the page and how that's done, and you learn

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how to spot self-indulgence, how you don't need it. You learn how to become very free and easy about moving things around, which a reader would never do. A reader sees a printed book and that's it. But when you see a manuscript as an editor, you say, Well this is chapter twenty, but it should be chapter three. You're at ease in the book the way a surgeon is at ease in a human chest, with all the blood and the guts and everything. You're familiar with the material and you can toss it around and say dirty things to the nurse.

INTERVIEWER

Do you accept advice ever?

DOCTOROW

No, none.

INTERVIEWER

Well, on that decisive note perhaps some of you in the audience have some questions to put to Mr. Doctorow.

AUDIENCE (*gentleman wearing dark glasses*)

What responsibilities do you think writers or artists should have to those who can't be heard—like Andrei Sakharov? Do you consider yourself to be someone who should be speaking out?

DOCTOROW

Well, yes. Modernism made us think of writing as an act of ultimate individualism. But, in fact, every writer speaks for a community. If you read Mark Twain, for instance, you know that there's a whole people behind that voice. I don't mean necessarily ethnically or geographically, but as a writer you get that feeling once you get going that you're not just speaking for yourself. You remember the way people waited at New York docks for the ship bringing in the latest Dickens installment? They called up to the crew, "Is little Nell dead?" Or how when Victor Hugo died all of France went into mourning. That's what I mean. There's a profound relationship. The

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writer isn't made in a vacuum. Writers are witnesses. The reason we need writers is because we need witnesses to this terrifying century. Novelists have always written about intimacies, about personal relationships. Since in the twentieth century one of the most personal relationships to have developed is that of the person and the state, we have to write about it, and some of us have. It's become a fact of life that governments have become very intimate with people, most always to their detriment.

AUDIENCE (*a young student*)

Do you see a danger in the proliferation of creative writing graduate programs around the country?

DOCTOROW

Are you a writing student?

AUDIENCE

Actually, I'm trying to decide whether or not to become one. . . .

DOCTOROW

Well, there is a danger. Since World War II the university has become the great patron of writers. Originally the poets worked out this scheme for staying alive. Robert Frost was drawing big audiences for his readings. Dylan Thomas came and read from this very stage at the 92nd Street Y. Suddenly there was this whole new possibility: it was like the poet's equivalent of the invention of the computer chip. Poets got university jobs teaching poetry. Then they invited other poets to come and read. A network sprang up. Writing programs came into being. The poets built up this alternate communication system of poetry. We novelists never paid much attention. Poets are much better friends to each other than we are. We are always relating to our publishers. So we came to this kind of late. Nevertheless we are in it now. There are writing programs all over the country. The great danger is that you are creating and training not just writers but teachers of writing.

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In other words, someone goes into a graduate writing program, gets an MFA in writing, and immediately gets a job on another campus teaching other young people to get their MFA's in writing. So you have this whole other thing—teachers of writing begetting teachers of writing, and that's bad. On one hand you see the results of that, generally speaking, which is that the writing of young people today is much more technically assured than it's ever been. You'll see what I mean if you read Faulkner's first novel. It's a terrible, clumsy book. Most first novelists who come out of university training are craftier than he was. On the other hand the horizon of the university-trained writers is diminished; the field for their work and attention is generally the bedroom, the living-room, the family. The doors are closed, the shades are pulled down, and it's as if there were no streets outside, and no town, no highway, no society. So that's the danger. But then you start thinking of all the good writers who have come out of the university writing programs, and how valuable they are and how fortunate we are to have them, and you can't condemn the system totally. [*To the student in the audience*] Why don't you just consult the I Ching before you make your decision?

AUDIENCE (*gentleman in back*)

Have you ever consciously set out to develop a style, or have your books been more organic?

DOCTOROW

I don't want a style. This was something that I was trying to explain earlier, that I want the book to invent itself. I think that the minute a writer knows what his style is, he's finished. Because then you see your own limits, and you hear your own voice in your head. At that point you might as well close up shop. So I like to think that I don't have a style, I have books that work themselves out and find their own voice—their voice, not mine. So I'll have that illusion, I think—I hope—till the very end.

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AUDIENCE (*same gentleman*)

Isn't it true that there are many writers who have a definite style, like Henry James?

DOCTOROW

Yes! And look at the botch he made of things.

AUDIENCE (*lady in sixth row*)

How was your experience writing a play different from writing a book? Would you write another?

DOCTOROW

That play happened roughly the way the books happen. I happened to be reading a translation of a speech that Mao Zedong made to his troops in the field in 1935. It had an extraordinarily familiar sound. I thought that he wrote just like Gertrude Stein. To test that proposition I went to my copy of Stein's essays, opened it at random. They both repeated nouns instead of using pronouns. In fact they repeated everything—nothing was ever stated just once. Pieces of the sentences changed during each repetition, and it turned out the unit of sense was not the sentence but the paragraph. So I reasoned that any rhetoric common to the leader of a billion people and Gertrude Stein was worth trying. It turned out, of course, that as a Sinologist told me, not just Mao's prose, but all transliteration from the Chinese sounds like Gertrude Stein. Nevertheless I was on my way. I found myself writing a monologue. The speaker was angry at everything and everybody—a real sorehead. Then I began to hear opposition in the same rhetoric to all his assertions and claims. I wrote these down, and to keep everything straight I started giving the positions in this argument names. The sorehead, I thought it was only fair to give my own name. One thing led to another and these dialogues became a play in which a man pulls a gun at a dinner party; he sort of hijacks the dinner party and then ties up the honored guests, their children, and so on. This is not the way

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plays are usually written. Nor is it a typical American play. It's not a domestic biography. It doesn't have pathos in it. People don't talk about their childhoods. They take their characters from their ideas. They speak in this ceremonial way. It ran down at the Public Theater for six weeks. I had a wonderful cast. Christopher Plummer was in it, Mike Nichols directed it, and it was terrific. The critics—or what pass for critics in New York theater—hated it. It is now a kind of cult play in university and regional theaters, and I like to see it when I can. All in all it was a wonderful experience, and I hope never to do it again.

AUDIENCE (*gentleman waving hand*)

What's the name of it?

DOCTOROW

*Drinks Before Dinner* is what it's called.

AUDIENCE (*woman in red scarf*)

Have you ever had the experience of losing a story because you talked about it to somebody before you've written it?

DOCTOROW

Yes. When you're talking about a story you're writing it. You're sending it out into the air, it's finished, it's gone.

INTERVIEWER

Is that actually so? You couldn't tell a story at a dinner party that you thought you could use?

DOCTOROW

Occasionally, you want to show off. The moment's too good, and you want to impress somebody. So you take one of these secret, private things, and present it to the table. It's over, it's done, you'll never be able to use it. It's a very reckless thing to do. Maybe you've made a decision that you don't really want it, you don't really need it. Because there are certain stories that we all have that we never use, that are more valuable to

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us not being used. But by and large it's better to restrain yourself.

INTERVIEWER

The discipline must be extraordinary, because so many of the stories are so wonderful, very much the sort that should be told at dinner parties. I'm thinking of the story you have of the robbery on the Long Island Expressway, of the Chevrolet that bumps the Mercedes. It's in the monologue in *Lives of the Poets*.

DOCTOROW

But I didn't tell that story before I wrote it, because if I did I could not have written it.

INTERVIEWER

You must be very poor at dinner parties, holding on to those stories.

DOCTOROW

On the other hand, you never know when I might pull a gun.

**—George Plimpton**

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*Five Poems by Gerald Stern*

## A Song for the Romeos

*for my brothers Jim Wright and Richard Hugo*

I'm singing a song for the romeos
I wore for ten years on my front stoop in the North Side,
and for the fat belly I carried
and the magic ticket sticking out of my greasy hatband
or my vest pocket,
the green velvet one with the checkered borders
and the great stretched back with the tan ribs
going west and east like fishes of the deep looking for their covers.

I'm wearing my romeos
with the papery thin leather
and the elastic side bands.
They are made for sitting,
or a little walking into the kitchen and out,
a little tea in the hands,
a little Old Forester or a little Schenley in the tea.

I'm singing a song for the corner store
and the empty shelves;
for the two blocks of flattened buildings
and broken glass;
for the street car that still rounds the bend
with sparks flying through the air.

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And the woman with a shopping bag,
and the girl with a book
walking home behind each other,
their steps half-dragging, half-ringing,
the romeos keeping time,
tapping and knocking and clapping on the wooden steps
and the cement sidewalk.

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## Richard Strauss, My Hero

Richard Strauss, my hero, here you are
finally letting go of both sword and breast,
and there you are escaping from our bleeding world
onto a mountain or into a cloud. I stare
at the pink fixture, it is a flattened breast
with a longish nipple, breasts half over the world
are covering light bulbs, there is a light bulb out
and a darkened breast in the other room; I stay here
with my lilacs and daisies, I am in my bed
of needles. Now it's Schumann again, the second,
his deep depression gone by the final movement
and soon it will be Mozart, Europe again,
the true Europe, lilacs everywhere,
the cellos of the plant world. This is the last
good day for the first bouquet. I know there are some
daisies left among the lilies. The second
bouquet is better, it refuses to bow,
it brings the outside in, I think it's the blue-bell,
I think it's the red bud crawling and twisting, a kind of
Japanese dancing, maybe more formal than twisting.
I am writing the fourteenth now. I'm doing it
in a room with all my boxes and boots and paintings.
I'm getting ready to move. My bed of needles—
crooked, antique—is in the midst of it all.
Each day I walk a mile, I crawl and twist
like a broken branch, I pass the scented tree,
I pass the poppies, I pass the lilacs, I climb
two giant hills, my face is twisted, I hold
the rusted rail—this house is historical—
and pull myself up the steps. My crisis was the spine,
one or two flattened discs, I had the pain,
I had the depression, I had the boredom. There are
paths I know that no one knows. I know
the color of tulips in every yard. I know
the sheets of green with yellow discs. I watch them
turn white. I know a house so small the owners

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are either midgets with squeaky voices or giants
with little chairs and tables, little beds
they and their children play in. There is a mail box
nailed onto the shingles. There is a railing
falling over—the giants' heavy touch,
the midgets' swinging. There is a small backyard
with white and purple lilacs. I am listening
to Haydn's sixty-sixth, the ever loyal
Haydn, Haydn the good, Ben Franklin Haydn.
I take my pills—daily at bedtime—I look at
my Cretan rug. I fought for days to save
five or ten dollars, every day the dealer
sent out for coffee, every day he told me
about his life in Chicago and every day
we struggled in silence. I turn the lights out, my mind
is all alone, it begs for valium, it cries
for milk and scotch. At four in the morning the birds
and I are screaming. I start my long walk at five;
the shadows let me alone, the perfume tree
is silent, my hands are shaking—a little residual,
weakness—my leg is dragging, I turn the corner
to a kind of dawn, there is a weak light over
the sycamores—the perfume tree is apple—
the red bud is split in two, the poppies are opening.
It was a slow and painful recovery.

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## A Pair of Hands

That is a pair of white hands I see
floating in the mirror, the fingers on the left
are blunt and rounded, the ones on the right are raised
as if in thought. They are almost like gloves,
the lines are gone, they are abstracted, the suffering
is in the creases, somewhere in the folds
underneath the knuckles, or somewhere in the spaces
over the fingertips. I choose them this time
over the mouth, the mouth with two great trenches
and two great cheeks beyond the trenches, the mouth
with a curled smile, and I choose them over the eyes,
surrounded by wrinkles, wounded and bloodshot. The hands
are permanent and heavy, they are the means
both to pain and pleasure, thus the ancient
Peruvians buried them inside their clothes,
thus the Arabs cut them off and fed
them to their dogs. Our age is weak—and vague—
in what it does with hands, there is a history
both of terror and loathing. My first forty years
were an agony. I lived by touching and holding.
It was my ruin.

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## Nobody Else Alive

Nobody else alive knows the four heart sounds
and nobody touches the four soft places
and raises his wing to look for lice; and nobody
else sees himself as one of the skeletons
with another old white one in his arms
or looks for his keys in the long-term parking
and ends up with his pockets inside out
and his head pounding from the iron telephone pole.

Nobody is as clumsy.
Nobody breaks his darling's six new wine glasses
with a yellow sponge
or spills a pitcher of ice over his warm hand
or rubs his puzzled fingers over the butter
looking for paper.
Nobody carries his small notebook with such pure sorrow
and crosses his bloody femurs with such odd joy.

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## Saturday Afternoon

How beautiful Siegfried is
communing with nature.
How gently he places his elves' shoes
in the soft dirt where a root is
and listens to the flutes.

How good it is to lie there
waiting for love;
fighting the fire,
climbing the cold rock,
destroying sleep.

How chaste it is
with my books on the table
and a glass of cold tea at my side,
waiting for the dark light
and the pain between the shoulders
and the coming of knowledge, all things unravelled and
forgotten.

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*Three Poems by Linda Gregg*

## Return to Paros

Up the mountain again three years later,
rocking forward like a burro.
Breathing hard in and out.
Stone, tough earth, loosely tied bales
of wheat all the same color in the sun.
Giant curve of Her shape above me.
Sky dark blue behind that.
Eyes down again picking the way until
finally I stop and deliberately look ahead.
One fig tree. Old dark leaves
and ugly branches easy to break. So aged.
Bark so old I think of weeping. Motionless.
Managing leaves this year but no fruit.
The barrenness of Her place now.
The view all around sky and shining sea.
Her most of all, and the stillness.
The sun so overpowering it is like night
in daytime. Seeing what I live with
only when my eyes close.

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## After the Beginning

The woman is preparing her body for sleep.
She hangs the hair forward
and it almost touches her feet.
After brushing, she throws it up and back
on to her shoulders. Then splashes water
on her face twenty times.
There is someone inside her happier
than she is, waking as she goes to sleep.

A child rolls a ball to where Death stands
and waits for him to roll it back.
But Death does not touch it.
Death covers his face with his hands
and turns away. The child runs after
wanting to play.

The woman would like a husband and child.
The desire is curled within her body.
She takes flowers into the man's house
and thinks of finding music on the radio.
He puts his cheek against her cheek,
his mouth on her naked shoulder.
There is no music. She pays attention
to his body. It is night and quiet
all around his embraces.

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## It is the Rising I Love

As long as I struggle to float above the ground
and fail, there is reason for this poetry.
On the stone back of the Ludovici throne, Venus
is rising from the water. Her face and arms
are raised, and two women trained in the ways
of the world help her rise, covering her
nakedness with a cloth at the same time.
If this continues, she, goddess of beauty
and love will have accomplished the earth
where I stand. She from water to land,
me from earth to air as if I had a soul.
It is the rising I love, in no matter what
element, to the one above. As I ascend, helped
by prayers and not by women, I say in all my
sexual glamor, see my body bathed in light and air.
See me rise like a flame, like the sun, moon,
stars, birds, wind. In light. In dark.
But I never achieve it. I get down on my knees
this grey April to see if open crocuses have a smell.
I must live in the suffering and desire of what
rises and falls. The terrible blind grinding
of gears against our bodies and lives.

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*Three Poems by John Ash*

## A Long Encounter

*for Maggie Paley*

Only the dead don't know
what heaven's like. For the rest
extrapolation is possible.

To meet someone for the first time
and immediately adore them, as if
they were the sun, would be one instance.

I don't mean you should fall in love
with this person, simply that when they speak
from the far side of a littered table

you should know you have entered a new country,
and its landscape, architecture and songs
will continue to embrace you and fascinate you

through long years. An avenue has opened
and its trees are pricked with lights.
There is nothing you can't afford, if what

is expended is sympathy. These people
are to be treasured and celebrated
as if each were a public holiday, –

the planting of a first harvest
after a long and terrible voyage,
the construction of the first house in a wilderness.

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## Party Damage

The invitations were returned
or people arrived on the wrong evening,
so your worst fears were fulfilled
and you sent the singers home, still in costume.
The weather changed and changed again.
The hospital was a kind of inverted cake
with white, glazed icing dripping from its eaves.

It is as natural that confusion
and anxiety should be our companions
as it is that old women should complain
in pharmacies; yet some things should be clear
as summer's red sail turning in the bay.

"Please understand I mean exactly what I say,
no more." A word is spoken, an ordinary word,
and it becomes an entire landscape,—
an open and illustrated city: you might be
alone in a desert at noon with nothing
but the mirage of a Pepsi Cola sign to guide
your feet, or penniless on Fifth Avenue
without even a scarf to sell as Christmas approaches,—
or else you are the young prince in his walled paradise
idly shooting song birds with a jewelled arrow.

Please return the arrow: I think I put that jewel there.
Don't harm the animals or birds. Leave
heaven or hell out of consideration.
Certain things are, in the end, unforgivable
though it may take years for this to be noticed,
like a red stain pressing through a wall.

"The other day I was walking up an avenue,—
I forget its number,— when I saw the word SAVE
written in skywriting far above the city.
I am not making this up: it happened."

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## In the Street

Man has loved nature too much.
It is time to love man. And woman.

And the works of each. We must hurry
While the colors last,

As emptiness and redundancy
Approach head-on like trucks.

Destruction follows from the first premise.
In the sunsets you can see it happening.

In the tired lineaments of buildings
It is written as a fateful paragraph.

If a small plant takes root above
The cornice of the power-station, that is not hope.

Trees, in their way, are astonishing,
Especially on summer evenings,

But all you can do is leave them alone,
Which cannot happen. So the canopy is removed.

Man is an abuse. He writes the history of loathing
On the cracked mirror of the earth.

But the face you might elicit
From a doorway and some windows on the street

Is different: erase its frown,
The wrinkles of its mouth.

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*Two Poems by Jorie Graham*

## Self Portrait as Apollo and Daphne

1.

The truth is this had been going on for a long time during
which
they both wanted it to last.

You can still hear them in that phase, the north and
south laid up against each other, constantly erasing
each minute with each minute.

You can still hear them, there, just prior to daybreak,
the shrill cheeps and screeches of the awakening thousands
hysterical, for miles, in all the directions,

and there the whoo whoo of the nightfeeders, insolvent
baseline,
shorn, almost the sound of thin air. . . .

Or there where the sun picks up on the bits of broken glass
throughout the miles of grass for just a fraction of an instant
(thousands of bits) at just one angle, quick, the evidence,
the landfill,
then gone again, everything green, green. . . .

2.

How he wanted, though, to possess her, to nail the erasures

3.

like a heat on her all day once the daysounds set in, like
a long analysis.

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4.

The way she kept slipping away was this: can you really
see me, can you really know I'm really who. . . .
His touchings a rhyme she kept interrupting (no one
believes in that version anymore she whispered, no one
can hear it anymore, *tomorrow*, *tomorrow*,
like the different names of those girls
all one girl). . . . But how long could it
last?

5.

He kept after her like sunlight (it's not what you think, she said)
frame after frame of it (it's not what you think you think)
like the prayer that numbers are praying (are they ascending
are they descending?)

He kept after her in the guise of the present,
minute after minute (are they ascending are they are they?)
until they seemed to quicken and narrow (like footprints

piling up, like footprints all blurred at the end of, at
the scene of . . .)

until *now is forever* he whispered can't you get it to open,

present tense without end, slaughtered motion, kingdom of
heaven?—

6.

the shards caught here and there—*what did you do*
*before?* or *will you forgive me?* or *say*
*that you'll love me for*

*ever and ever*

(is it a squeal of brakes is it a birthcry?)

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(let x equal forever he whispered let y let y . . .)

7.

as opposed to that other motion which reads Cast it upon the ground
and it shall become a serpent (and Moses fled before it),
which reads Put forth thy hand and take it by the tail
and it was a rod in his hand again—

8.

That's when she stopped she turned her face to the wind she shut her eyes—

9.

She stopped she turned,
she would not be the end towards which he was ceaselessly tending,
she would not give shape to his hurry by being its destination,
it was wrong this progress, it was a quick iridescence
on the back of some other thing, unimaginable, a flash on the wing of . . .

10.

The sun would rise and the mind would rise
and the will would rise and the eyes—The eyes—:
the whole of the story like a transcript of sight,
of the distance between them, the small gap he would close.

11.

She would stop, there would be no chase scene, she would be who,
what?

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12.

The counting went on all round like a thousand birds
each making its own wind—Who would ever add
them up—

and what would the sum become, of these minutes, each
flapping
its wings each after a perch,

each one with its call unanswered, unanswered,

each one signalling separately into the end of the
daybreak,

the great screech of the instants, the pile-up,
the one math of hope, the prayer nowhere is praying,

frame after frame, collision of tomorrows—

No she would go under she would leave him in the
freedom

his autograph all over it, slipping, trying to notch it,

13.

there in the day with him now, his day, but altered,

14.

part of the view not one of the actors, she thought,

not one of the instances, not one of the examples,

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15.

but the air the birds call in,
the air their calls going unanswered marry in,
the calls the different species make, cross-currents,
  frettings,
and the one air holding the screeching separateness—
each wanting to change, to be heard, to have been
  changed—
and the air the air all round them neither full nor empty
but holding them, holding them, untouched,
  untransformed.

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## Of Forced Sightes and Trusty Ferefulness

Stopless wind, here are the columbine seeds I have
collected. What we would do with them is
different. Though both your trick and mine flowers blue
and white

with four stem tails and yellow underpetals. Stopless
and unessential, half-hiss, half-
lullaby, if I fell in among your laws,
if I fell down into your mind your snow, into the miles

of spirit-drafts you drive, frenetic multitudes,
out from the timber to the open ground and back to no
avail, if I fell down, warmblooded, ill, into your endless
evenness,

into this race you start them on you will not let
them win. . . . ?
If I fell in?
What is your law to my law, unhurried hurrying?
At my remove from you, today, in your supremest

calculation, re-
adjustment, are these three birds scratching for dead
bark beetles, frozen seeds, too late for being here yet only
here,
in the stenchfree

cold. This is another current, river of rivers, this thrilling
third-act love. Who wouldn't want to stay
behind? They pack the rinds away, the blazing applecores,
the frantic shadow-wings scribbling the fenceposts,
window-

panes. Meanwhile you turn, white jury, draft, away,
deep justice done.
I don't presume to cross the distances, the clarity,
but what grows in your only open hands? Or is

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digressive love,
row after perfect greenhouse row,
the garden you're out of for good, wind of the theorems,
of proof, square root of light,

chaos of truth,
blinder than the mice that wait you out
  in any crack?
This is the best I can do now for prayer—to you,
for you—these scraps I throw

my lonely acrobats
that fall
of your accord
right to my windowsill: they pack it away, the grains, the

accidents, they pack it deep into the rent
heart of the blue
spruce, skins in with spiky needles. . . . Oh
  hollow
charged with forgetfulness,

through wind, through winter nights, we'll pass,
steering with crumbs, with words,
making of every hour
a thought, remembering

by pain and rhyme and arabesques of foraging
the formula for theft
under your sky that keeps
sliding away

married to hurry
and grim song.

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# Shepherds

## W. S. Merwin

For a few years I had a garden in a ruined village. I worked through the long summer afternoons on a limestone upland full of the sound of cicadas, in a place that I had found.

The garden was a long triangle surrounded by gray limestone walls worn at the tops like old mountains. When I first came to it there was no garden to be seen. Only one wall was visible. The highest one, chin level. No doubt the oldest. The wall ran along the lane, with long streamers of blackberry canes flowing over it into the bleached rubble and thin grass, the wild marjoram and red herb robin scribbled along the way. It faced south and saw the whole day. The other side of the wall was deep in a rough sea of wild blackberry bushes. They crowded the undefined corner west of the ruined one-roomed house with its roofless stones, its whole west wall the back of a chimney.

I looked over from the lane onto the storm of blackberry bushes. Beyond that there were three walnut trees standing in broken stones, and then a grove of small oaks, dark and still, with their feet in their own leaves and shadow. M. Vert said they were truffle oaks, and that was a truffle grove. But he

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added, though he wanted to sell the land, that no one had found a truffle there for a very long time. It was also true that anyone who knew where truffles grew would deny the fact, to keep it secret.

M. Vert pointed to splashes of shiny black balls spilled in the lane. Fresh sheep droppings. "The neighbor," he said, with contempt. He meant, as I realized in a moment, the neighbor's sheep. The neighbor, he explained, pushing up his lower lip hard against the rest of his face, the neighbor permitted his sheep to go anywhere. As though the whole place belonged to him. The neighbor took his sheep in there too, he said, jutting his chin toward the ruin and the enclosure around it.

He showed me where the neighbor had deliberately let his sheep in to that bit of stony upland. The old entrance from the lane, with its stone gate posts, had been destroyed at some time in the past. The huge rough stones that had once been there had been removed. M. Vert told me that he had dragged them away himself, on the trailer behind his tractor. The frayed ends of the wall had collapsed into the long grass and blackberry tangles. A barrier of dead sloe branches, laid across the opening, had been pushed aside. Behind the wall, in the shadow of the bushes, the lush green grass of spring, sicklewort, agrimony, horsemint, had been broken and trampled here and there, in thin lines. M. Vert indicated more sheep droppings, pale and old. I would do well, he said, to tell the neighbor he had no business in there, and keep him out.

They were no good in that family, any of them, M. Vert told me, shaking his head as slowly as a bull's, all the way from one side to the other, with his lower lip crumpled up again. They were good for nothing. "They have nothing," he said, as though he were saying everything.

He had stopped under the mossy walnut tree just inside the barrier, to make his point, jabbing the stumps of two lost fingers of his right hand in my direction, twisting one side of his face and closing one eye as he peered up at me. The father was like that, he said to me, and the grandfather. The old woman is just the same. "They do nothing," he said. "They do nothing."

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Some land they sold for debts, he told me, and he looked to see whether I knew what "debts" meant. In the pause I realized that he had dropped his voice, and that the oaks were utterly still. The grandfather drank, he continued, still more quietly. They sold some land for that. He touched his forehead and shook his head. "Look," he said, stepping aside, covering his mouth with his hand. "The father. He drank too. He and the sons went hunting. They were always going hunting. They loved to hunt. They had time for that. Doing nothing.

"One day they were going out hunting. They had the dogs. They were just along from the green across from the house, there. Already—" M. Vert held an invisible bottle up to his face, with the stumps of his fingers, and tossed back his head. "And it was the morning. They were climbing over the wall, and the father caught his leg in a bush and the shotgun went off. They got him home but nobody would go for the doctor, and he died. The sons were drunk at the funeral.

"You mustn't let them in here," M. Vert said. "They're not to be trusted. Things have been known to disappear. One knows what one knows. The neighbor can't work for anybody around here. He doesn't do anything anyway. He takes out the sheep. The old woman isn't any better. She's always out looking for something. She has her pension, you understand, and as long as they have that, that's what they have. They're crazy."

It was an old walnut tree, over us, but it had stayed small in that thin soil. Three others of the same age followed the wall along the lane, shading an overgrown inner enclosure. M. Vert was standing outside the gray wreck of the stone house. A shepherd's house. The stones of its front door, like the entrance stones along the lane, had been extracted. M. Vert said that he had pulled them out at the same time that he had taken the tiles off the roof, and the stones framing the nearer of the two windows. The stones of the other window were already cracked from the frost, at the time, he explained, and so he had left those. That was years ago.

The single room of the ruin was full of whitened rubble from the walls, pieces of stone clicking underfoot, moss and nettles and blackberry bushes clouding the corners. And yet

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the walls appeared to be intact except for the jagged spaces laced with blackberry canes where the door and front window had been. They still bore, along their steep-pitched upper edges, the shallow staircases of flat stones, lapped to keep the rain out. And there were sockets for the ends of the oak beams. M. Vert had "pulled" those too, he said, and the rafters, they were good. He had used them. One heavy beam that was the mantlepiece of the fireplace was still there at eye level, running most of the way across the western end of the room into a notch in the upright slab of rough limestone that made, all by itself, the chimney corner. Between that stone and the wall, M. Vert explained, they had piled firewood to keep it dry. It was one of the few things, I thought, that we knew about them. In the back of the fireplace the small hollow left by their fires was disappearing under the wiry tangle of small bushes but it was there, washed white again.

The south wall, where the door and one window had been, and the north wall, with the other window embrasure across from the door, were the lower walls, on which the eaves had rested. The stones inside had been covered, up to the height of the beams, with an uneven coat of sandy cement in which, at a later date, on the east wall, a cross had been scratched, and a few illegible initials, something that looked like a date, over near the north window. The east wall rose higher, to take the end of the roof tree. Above the level where the loft floor had lain on the beams the stones were not cemented or mortared. There was a small stone window hole up there facing out into the walnut leaves and the blue sky. The east wall was already leaning outward. It was, M. Vert said, merely the stones. He turned, and it was clear that he was referring to the whole building.

For some reason, when he had torn out everything he had wanted, he had left the shallow stone sink in the base of the south window, where the dishes had been washed. Outside the window, hens had followed us in from the lane. The neighbor's, M. Vert said. From the trees, voices of chaffinches and black-capped warblers circled us. The walls held the light like a prism, framing a piece of sky in which a few clouds slipped

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southward so that when I looked up the ruin seemed to be rolling silently toward the shadowy oak trees. It smelled as though the roof were still on and the house had been standing closed.

"I saw it inhabited," M. Vert said. "The old woman here," he said, speaking of the last person who had lived in the house, "grew good potatoes in the garden there."

The inner wall of the garden, on the side away from the lane toward the oaks, ran along under bushes to a low building at the end, round as the houses of the Gauls and roofed with stone slabs of limestone broad as table tops, piled up in the shape of a straw beehive. An oven. A stone shelf crossed the front of it at waist level: a sill, plain, elegant, and practical. Neglect had roughened it. But inside, the vaulted brick ceiling had never moved. The rusted oven door was still leaning against the dark arch of the opening, held in place by blackberry vines, and the dust on the square bricks of the oven floor was still gray with the ashes of brambles. The gray dust hung in the cobwebs and the few hair roots that had found their way down through the stone roof into the still cave. Field mice lived along the sill. In time I pulled the brambles from the cracks outside, and replanted irises and shepherd's thyme where they had grown before, around the edge of the oven roof and along the tops of the garden walls as they emerged.

The back of the oven occupied one corner of the garden, a small Romanesque apse, a formal cave in the open, floating through the centuries like an ark on a river. The stones had been as beautifully cut and fitted as they were in the masonry of the churches of the region, and the stone eaves, at waist-level if one were standing in the garden, sat on the walls in perfect shallow tiers, like the rings on the cap of a mushroom.

As the brambles were drawn away from the back of the oven their shadows came with them, dark green shadows, and the stone appeared, pale to the sunlight and also facing south, but in a curve, looking onto the south of the world, the southern stars, the south wind with its lashing rain.

By the time I had got to there I had indeed found the garden. I wanted to see where she had grown her potatoes. I wanted to grow some there again.

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I had brought a sickle and an old pitchfork with a handle made of hazelnut sapling, for clearing the brambles. I had watched the people of the region cutting blackberry bushes, the branches that moved in as you turned your back, and made the old men welcome the new machines not as means of profit but as weapons of vengeance upon the brambles that had beaten them from the fields. The machines vindicated them, avenged them, routed the enemy. But even with machines appearing here and there, the old continued to cut the brambles with sickle and pitchfork, at the edges of fields, along the crumbling walls. It was good for them, they said, clearing under the walnut trees before the walnuts fell, and under the plum trees before the plums ripened. And before the plums, here and there the cherries, if they bothered with cherries. Sometimes they cleared the brambles from around the roses at the edges of manure piles, the Autumn Flowering Damasks, the Roses of Four Seasons, as they called them.

The *cantonniers* used a sickle and a pitchfork. They kept their murky bottles tucked under piles of freshly cut green grass in the shade of the sloe bushes as they worked their way along the blowsy verges of the back roads, clearing and leaving a trail of neat piles to vouch for them. They knew where the springs were in the shade. They paused to roll cigarettes, which they smoked soaking wet. They sharpened their sickles carefully, patiently, endlessly. The sweat of a *cantonnier*, according to a local saying, is very bad. The saying was repeated like a chorus, as the *cantonniers* sharpened their sickles in the shade. Some of them were rotund and red and had worked at other things at one time. They kept their hair cut short up the backs of their necks, and they glared and puffed and sweated. Some were languid, silent, fair-haired. It was surprising to learn that they had wives and children. It was also surprising to see how much they had cleared in a day, and where they piled the brambles, keeping them separate from the grass. At one time the young canes of blackberry bushes were used for wrapping the rye straw and then stitching the long rolls into beehives. And the dried bramble cuttings were piled up to burn in the ovens, to bake the big loaves of bread for the week.

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For cutting thick brush, sometimes the people of the region used a heavy crescent-shaped sickle at the end of a long handle—a billhook, a *serpette*—but I was never very adept with one of those. With the ordinary sickle I could watch what I was doing, catch sight of what was growing under the brambles before I swung the blade, cutting the years.

The hens followed me through the barrier and scratched among the oak leaves. There were so few people on that upland that there were almost no words in the day. To the left of the place where the entrance from the lane had once stood framed in stone the bushes were thick and lush, the soil under them black. Some kind of outbuilding must have stood there, with its back to the beautifully built wall that formed the narrow end of the garden. That section of wall, I saw as the brambles were drawn back, still bore its top course of flat stones lapped vertically. All of the walls that were built to last, it was said—which meant all of the walls until the present century—were built like that. The vertical stones held the tops of the walls together, and the sheep, and even the goats, did not like to run on them. The entrance to the garden was at the narrow, eastern end, just at the corner near the house. There was a stone sill at the opening, for a gate, one step up. A garden of blackberries, nettles, and wild marjoram. I wondered why I should change it, but I did.

In the fair afternoons of spring, with the light still downy, the air sweet from the ground, I came day after day to slip through the newly reopened garden entrance and cut another patch of brambles. I carried off the thrashing, snatching, scratching tangles of vines on the end of the pitchfork, out of the old garden, to stack them along the low places in the walls, where the hens came over. The narrow end of the garden was not much more than a dozen feet across. West of there, the garden ran for some sixty feet or more. The far wall, hidden in brambles, seemed buried in the remote future. Here and there through gaps in the brambles I could see that it too had most of its vertical course of stones along the top. One morning while the air was still cool I found, in the dark damp

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shadow of the brambles the white translucent skin of a large harmless snake. In two pieces.

When I had laid bare a little of the inside of the wall along the lane, M. Vert came by one afternoon with a load of sheep manure and forked it over the wall, where I found it later in the day. A present. He had told me that he liked my efforts to revive the garden, and when I saw him and spoke of the manure he said that he had been taking it out to the fields anyway, and had just brought me a load in passing.

By then I had begun, with an old digging fork, to turn over a little of the area I had cleared, working the tines down into the heavy red clay and the mass of roots that had become the possessors of the place. I laid bare the hard brown knots of ancient blackberry kingdoms, the wiry arteries leading down between stones, mats of finer roots full of the dark soil that they had helped to make. The limestone base of the garden was seldom more than a foot below the surface, and I came to learn, a few inches at a time, clefts and fissures that led down through the porous shield of the upland with its endless galleries and caverns and underground streams far below me out of the sun. The place itself was a memory that I was recovering. Some few of the living, perhaps, and many of the dead, one by one, had known it this way, inch by inch, root by root. They had carried many fields in their minds, like this, and had spoken from that knowledge and had died with it. It was not something you could tell, apart from particular details, now and then. Every day it was strange to me to realize that I was letting the light in, and that as I did so the colors emerged without hesitation from where they had always been.

The first time the soil was turned over was devoted chiefly to the roots, levering them, tracing them, working them loose from their lives in the dark, hauling them into the sunlight. But even in that first disturbance of the contented ground I found signals of other lives to which I was wholly unforeseen. The shafts of worms. The iridescent tracks of snails. The crumbled litter of field mice and their children in the walls. The moles that had tunnels under the walls down into the cracks

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of the rock. One hot day as I went on interfering I lifted a stone and surprised a viper under it, who flexed, watching me, and waited. I let the stone back down carefully and never saw him afterwards. The same encounter had happened years before, miles from there, and I began to expect it to come round again.

The heavy soil was full of stones, fragments of the bedrock, pieces shattered by the front or fallen from the hands of the builders of walls, or from the walls themselves. There were fossils: extinct mollusks as large as lemons, etchings of sections of ferns. Small square nails made by hand. The iron sole from a wooden shoe. A bone button. A small coin from the last century, which someone had missed. Shards of crockery with pictures of flowers. The day I broke the second tine of the digging fork in a cleft of the rock I found an older digging fork in the ground next to the wall, the handle rotted out and all of its tines broken at different lengths. Even with short teeth, M. Vert explained to me later, the old forks were still good for digging potatoes. The day I reached the back of the oven, in my clearing, and pulled the brambles back from the masonry, I found, tucked among the flat stones of the eaves, part of the curved blade of a sickle.

By the time M. Vert had brought his load of manure I was ready to start layering some of it into the compost pile of weeds and grass roots that I had started in the corner, and digging some in where I thought to put in the first seeds, along the inner wall. Radishes, to have something soon from that garden to encourage me. There was a variety that promised radishes in eighteen days, and it was true. Less than three weeks after I had sowed them I took some up the lane for my supper, and some to Mme. Vert for theirs. She gave me a handful of lettuce plants from her garden, wrapped in a piece of wet newspaper. And I set in the first furrow of beans. Broad beans. It was still early enough in the year for them, and they grew well in the heavy lime soil of the region. They could even be sowed there in the fall, like St. Catherine peas. You wanted to get them in late, so that they would scarcely have begun to make leaves before the real frosts, otherwise the tender shoots

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would be bitten back by the winter. But if you caught the right moment in late October or early November, and the moon and the rain were right, and it was a mild winter, they would start off early in the spring while the ground was dark. A late hard frost could kill them then too, if it was severe enough, but you had a good chance of having young broad beans and St. Catherine peas weeks early, and if you lost them you could dig them under as soon as it was dry enough, and start again.

The wide trench for planting broad beans always looked like part of an archaeological survey. Any roots that were still left after the soil had been dug and dug and manured and dug again trailed in from the sides like hair and could be lifted out and tossed to the pile in the corner. I had one of the wide heavy mattocks of the region, bought at a fair without a handle—the handle came later. It seemed to do the job by itself, lifting out the soil a few inches deep, along the stretched white string.

The flat beans went in with the brown eye facing upward. An old woman in her walled garden in the village three miles away explained that the reason for that is that the sprout comes out of the eye and grows upward. If you have the bean on its side or with the eye downward the sprout has to grow farther. It may have to grow all the way around the bean to get to the surface, and it takes several days for it to do that. It will be behind the shoots that started the right way up. In heavy rains, she said, the bean planted wrong way up may even rot before its shoot reaches the surface.

I never knew beans of that kind when I was a child. They were unheard of where I grew up, in Pennsylvania, unless they were grown by some of those "foreigners" whose gardens my parents and their friends made fun of because instead of having patches of dazed shorn grass known as lawns, and nameless unnoticed bushes around their houses in the approved fashion, they "crowded every inch with vegetables." It is still important in many neighborhoods, no doubt, to show that you are above the need to do anything of the kind for yourself. It seems to me that I saw, outside Pisanelli's Italian grocery store, on the steep curve of Lower Taylor street, leading down into

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town, tall wicker baskets full of beans of that kind, lying on their sides, a pinkish or greenish tan, thicker than lima beans, longer and not so round, shaped more like a human ear or fetus. There were other baskets nearly filled with snails. If I was with my mother she remarked each time that foreigners ate those things. Everything about the place drew me as it was not supposed to: the sharp, troubling smells, the cheeses, sausages and hams hanging in string halters, the bundles of herbs, the gold of the cans. My mother shook her head at the flies and hurried us along home. When I was older and alone I walked past more slowly, a little anxious, listening to the strange language coming out of the darkness inside: the foreign language station on the radio, which I learned to find in my room at home and play quietly, in secret. I suppose the beans in those baskets had been imported. I remember now the light sound they made when someone, thinking of buying some, picked up a handful and let them run out between fingers and fall back into the basket like the dripping of eaves. Dried like that, they are smooth as foreheads, and it was a pleasure, those years later, to set each one back into the ground.

Always when they were planted it was cool. And each time I put them in I saw again the first field of them that I had come upon, long before I ever grew any myself. That was in Spain, in Mallorca, at the middle of the century. The north coast of the island. In the first weeks of the year when the days were sunny I climbed the stone paths and the steps built into the faces of the olive terraces far above the sea, toward the oak woods where the pigs ran, toward the huts of the charcoal burners, and the cliffs looming above me. The almond trees were in flower and the peaches in bud. The spring wild flowers on the terraces changed from one day to the next: anemones, lilies, cyclamens. The air was heavy with the smell of flowers, and as I climbed the fragrance grew still more intense. I heard a man singing a few long phrases, then talking, then singing again. I climbed a terrace wall and beyond two rows of olive trees there was a small open field, a surprise on the steep mountainside. The air was cooler up there, and there were

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wisps of cloud drifting from the cliff down across the field, and the strongest and sweetest smell was coming with them. The field was full of grayish-green broad-leaved plants, less than two feet tall, covered with flowers like white and black butterflies. A young man in black was walking away between the rows behind a mule that was pulling a small cultivator. He was talking to the mule, and singing. Then he came to the end of the row and turned and started back, and saw me. He stopped singing, and he talked to the mule in a lower voice. When he came near and I greeted him he scarcely answered. He wanted me to go, and I knew it, but I asked him what the plants were that he was growing. Not believing me—how could anybody not know that?—he told me that they were beans, and I left. But it was not until I grew broad beans myself, years later, and the oval leaves unfurled and the white and black flowers opened and the scent was there again, that I knew what kind of beans those were with the chill mist flowing through them.

The beans came up along the inner wall facing south, and I set some young plants of savory, that I had grown in pots, at the ends of the rows, thinking already of picking savory sprigs to steam with the beans when they were ready. The limestone upland, the *causse*, was fragrant too, in whatever season, and its scents changed through the hours as the shadows moved, and the cool patches in the air, the damp currents from under the trees. Beyond the west wall of the garden, in the spring, three big bird cherry trees silently exploded in white flowers, their thick sweetness laced with a rank bitterness like that of almonds. The bees hovered for hours in the sunlight reflected from the clouds of translucent petals among the small, waxy, pale green leaves. The smells of wet leaves and moss wandered along the walls under the oaks and walnuts. In the middle of the day the sun brought out the subtle smell of the upland itself, made up of scents of thyme and marjoram, of the baked stones and leaves and earth, the acrid notes of box and ivy. They turned through the day, undefinable but clear, and out in the garden on the *causse*, among

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the network of overgrown walls, they came to be a kind of sundial. From the scent of the air I could tell what part of the day it was.

And the *causse* was not silent. Bending toward the soil I would hear the sounds of the upland rise in my ears like water, though a moment before I might not have noticed that they were there. The leaves and the grass rustling. Cicadas, as the days grew warm. Crows off in the woods, half echo. Finches. The tsip of titmice. The occasional distant clonk of a sheep bell. The pensive hens cawing to themselves up the lane, reminding me of someone. There were few voices, and few sounds that broke the low continuo. Sometimes on the breeze I would hear M. Vert herding his half dozen red cows down another lane beyond the broad green, taking them to pasture in the morning, usually on foot. "Veng, veng, veng," he would be calling. He was away out of sight of the garden, but I knew that he was walking along rapidly in his black rubber boots crusted from the barn, a man short as a dwarf in a fairy tale, with his rod over his shoulder, looking back from time to time at the lead cow whose clear bell was singing behind him. If it was raining he walked more slowly under his big black umbrella.

Some days he came with his daughter Jacinthe, taller and more robust than he, and the black dog Montagne, who barked along behind them. Sometimes she came by herself, calling "Veng, veng, veng," more melodically than her father, more like the bell. Or one of them drove after the cows in their Citroen 2CV *fourgonette* that could take two sheep in the back and you could squeeze their lambs in after them. If the cows were brought down to one of M. Vert's pastures in the morning after milking, they would be fetched home at milking time in the evening, and when I heard him or Jacinthe talking them up the lane, and the bell steadily receding, it was time to start putting the garden tools away in the oven and—once the garden had begun to supply me with things to eat—to start picking something for supper.

But I did not hear that every day. M. Vert had several pastures and moved the cows around for reasons having to do

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with the weather, the grass, or where he happened to be working. There were other sounds that told of the progress of the day, that it was growing late. There were the birds. And there was that other herding voice, the neighbor's, coming from the direction opposite to M. Vert's—from the east, from out of sight too, when the neighbor was bringing his flock of thirty-seven sheep home along the lane where it dipped through dark oak woods, widened as it descended across a slope of naked rock, still between walls, then wound through a green hollow with lush young grass in meadows on either side and more woods beyond them, and passed beside the spring under overhanging rocks that had been the water source for the ruined shepherd's house. An arch of rusted iron and the crumbling lace of a pulley were reflected against the sky in the surface below.

I could hear the neighbor coming from as far as the oak woods, shouting at his sheep, "*Meh! meh! veux tu?*" Scolding at their tails, while their heads were poked through wooden gates into the tempting green. He was pretending to drive them past the rich grass that was not his, but he waited until they had a chance to get a bit of grazing first. A voice thick rather than deep. Rapid and crabbed, belligerent and anxious.

The sheep pattered through the mud and wet grass below the spring and scattered on the green space where the walls fell aside unevenly at the site of an intersection of lanes, some of which had long been abandoned, one of them leading down into the thickets and shadows of a hollow of oaks and sloe bushes. Two that were still used parted on the slope and continued to climb in diverging directions. From the spring the neighbor could take his sheep home along either of them. He could bear to the right and go up the bank to the paved road that had buried the lane for some distance, and follow the road to the left, under the railroad bridge, and then pick up the lane again—his and mine—on the other side, and clamber over the big rocks, like steps, on the slope, toward the garden. But he never came that way, although M. Vert said it was the way he was supposed to come. I could see why the neighbor would not want to take his sheep on the paved road,

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the long way around, under the railroad bridge. Instead he came the way he was not supposed to, turning left on the track made by his own sheep, up the railroad embankment and across the track, and on up through the no-man's land of rocks and scrub on the other side, to pick up the old lane there.

They crossed at a spot where a small maintenance hut stood by the tracks on a bed of crushed stone that looked alien, like the rest of the embankment, even though the actual stone had come from nearby. There was a grilled opening under the wooden eaves of the shed, and the door was seldom locked. The neighbor always paused to peer in through the grille, and sometimes opened the door to look inside, as though he were checking. And then he shut it carefully, quietly, and turned to his loud reminding of the sheep. He knew, of course, the hours when the trains came by, but even so he hurried them off the right-of-way, the single track, and onto the rough hillside beyond it where they knew the way up the slope and along to the left, to the walls that led under the walnut trees before the garden. Once the sheep were well away from the track his scolding lost some of its urgency. His voice dropped and became more absent-minded, even confidential, shooing them home, the few old bells bonking their dull notes, the lambs baa-ing, the ewes' guttural answers. They were still hidden from my sight, around the curve of the lane, behind the ruin of the shepherd's house and the overgrown enclosure under the walnut trees, when I began to hear their hooves coming like a rain squall on the bare rock of the lane, and then the sound of their jaws tearing at the grass at the foot of the walls. Then if I straightened up in the garden I would see them nosing in at the entrance. When they saw me they always startled and panicked and rushed a few steps backward, falling over each other, and usually about then the neighbor would appear around the bend, from the left.

He was stocky and short. Somewhere in his late thirties. He dressed like no one else on the *causse*. A tight sleeveless tank top, of a bright color, usually red. Satin athletic shorts, usually red. Sneakers. (In the summer.) His arms and legs were thick and tanned, and he wore no hat—a fact that, for M. Vert, was

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the ultimate mark of depravity. But M. Vert regarded the entire costume, which obviously had been imitated from pictures in the sports sections of the papers, as evidence of insanity, and a deliberate affront to the world as it should be. "He doesn't wear a hat," he said, shrugging his shoulders to sum it all up. "He'll kill himself." M. Vert washed his hands of the whole bad business, and deliberately talked of other things for a minute or two.

M. Vert had a fund of calumny about the neighbor which he referred to whenever I saw him. He would inquire about the neighbor and leer confidentially and then fish out the next morsel of innuendo. Things missing from empty houses in the village across the upland. Things missing from another empty house among the pastures. Nobody else around there would have taken anything, M. Vert repeated. Then a few years before when a nice young foreigner camped by the green the neighbor had come and hung over the wall and made remarks. He had made remarks, M. Vert repeated. "Reflections, even," he added by way of elucidation, but he raised his face with an expression indicating that he would carry the nature of those reflections in silence to the grave. The reflections had got worse, if possible, when the young foreigner was joined by a young woman and they both slept in the same tent and sometimes took naps in the hot afternoons. The neighbor leaned over the wall and watched them, and tried unsuccessfully to start conversations. He called in at them when they were in the tent in the afternoons. On the Sundays when his brother the roofer came from town to visit, bringing his fiancée in her tight bright clothes who stood and watched while the brother dismantled his car outside the house, on the green, she and the neighbor and the brother played the car radio as loud as they could and made the car engine roar, vroom, vroom, vroom, just to keep the foreigner and his girlfriend awake. And the neighbor had leaned over the wall and shouted, "Shouldn't sleep in the daytime," over and over. He and his brother went and sat on the roof of the hen house where they could look down into the grass around the tent, and from there they threw nutshells, twigs, and little stones at the tent. The neigh-

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bor's two dogs never stopped barking at the foreigners. When the foreigner had guests once or twice, who went home after dark, the neighbor jumped out from behind a bush, in the lane, to frighten them. M. Vert ended every installment of his detraction by saying, "He's crazy. They're all crazy," and often with an insistence that it had always been so.

I wondered, in fact, how the legend surrounding the excluded family had grown up, and how it had started, and whether it had been part of the neighbor's life from the beginning. I did not want to ask M. Vert, but I was not surprised one day to hear him mention as a further detail of his scorn for his neighbor, "He can't read. The old woman either." The neighbor had been the youngest child, M. Vert told me, and had scarcely gone to school at all.

M. Vert's scorn included the neighbor's dogs, Tikou and Finou. "Somebody gave them to him," M. Vert said. It was the usual way of acquiring dogs in the country, but M. Vert's tone implied that in this case it had been a way of disposing of animals nobody would have wanted. Many farms had two dogs at least. One would be the working dog, the herd dog, the dog in charge of the place, the watch dog, who on some farms was shut in with the cows or the sheep at night. The other, which was needed as a sign of gentlemanly leisure, was the hunting dog, who did nothing most of the year but eat soup and wander under the brambles sniffing, until hunting season.

The neighbor's hunting dog had been a trial to the young foreigners too, M. Vert informed me. And they were perfectly correct, the young people, he insisted indignantly. But the neighbor's dog had got in there more than once and stolen their food and left his dirt. When they emerged from their camp the dog barked at them, running in circles around them. That was the older dog, a rather large, dirty, white and black fox terrier, more or less. Tikou. When he had run around the green barking for an hour or so, Tikou was capable of picking up some scent or other, down a lane, or over a rock pile, and then he would be gone for hours, not returning until late, and there had been complaints from the village across the *causse* of visits from Tikou. Stray dogs might be shot in the country,

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and the owners, M. Vert said, were liable for any damages they caused. The neighbor took to locking Tikou into his kennel, an ancient stone pig-sty roofed with slabs of stone in the ruins behind the house, from which Tikou's muffled barking might rise, as from the grave, at any hour, and go on and on.

The other dog, Finou, was a dark smooth-haired bitch of no recognizable ancestry who had arrived, skinny and half-grown, and had learned all she knew from Tikou: how to run around the green and bark, how to duck around corners and bark, how to find things and slink off with them. She was the working dog. But she spent most of her time nosing around the green or tied up to the doghouse inside the chain link fence that enclosed a few square feet of ground in front of the neighbor's house. The brother the roofer had built it like the pictures, with a tile roof, and Finou would jump onto the roof and bark for a while and then slither down into the doghouse below. Finou obviously was not much help with the sheep, ignoring them, rushing off in one direction or another, having to be shouted back, and the neighbor seldom took her with him. If she was along he could be heard coming from farther away, roaring at her to come back, "Finou! Ici!" much louder than he bawled at his sheep. And because they were coming home she was likely to be well ahead of the sheep, coming around the bend in the lane. Then she would catch sight of me over the wall, and though she knew perfectly well who I was she would stop as though she had been caught in a robbery, and start to bark, and back up, and run back, colliding with the sheep, and hide behind the neighbor, peering around his legs and growling.

At first the neighbor looked at me that way himself, when he saw me in the garden straightening up beside a pile of cut brambles. The dog was not with him, and he was surprised and glowered and clearly was not disposed to answer my greeting with anything more than the unavoidable monosyllables. Yet day by day, evening by evening, the solemnities lengthened. They were warmed by mutual curiosity. The neighbor passed with the wall at his chin level, and he glanced over. But he said nothing and shooed the sheep homeward, sounding

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like rain going ahead of him. The hens and ducks had gathered in the lane and were waiting for his mother to get back with her load of firewood, to feed them outside the disused stone barn with holes in the roof that she used as a hen house. "It doesn't belong to them," M. Vert said. "It belongs to a cousin who bought it from the family. But they use it as though it were their own. Some day he's going to want it." It was part of a whole farm, with a yard in front of it full of brambles, and several huge walnut and oak trees. In the middle of the courtyard the stone lid of a cistern full of water, and a stone drinking trough awash with dead leaves. As he got to the entrance to that courtyard the neighbor always turned to look back.

It went from "Good evening," to "Good evening. How are you?" "Very well. And you?" "Very well. Thank you. Lovely evening." "Oh yes. So you're making a garden." "Seeing what I can do." "The old woman" (he had a slight stammer) he said, "who used to live here raised good potatoes." "What did she use for manure?" "Oh, I think it was sheep." Before each sentence his eyelids leaped up drawing the eyes wide and his mouth opened into a small "o" through which he inhaled. "I don't know whether she had rabbits." A revelation came to him. "She had her goats," he said. "And her sheep. Yes. That's what she used. I'm sure of it. That's what she used."

We became friends.

One evening as I was going up the lane toward the west, after leaving the garden for the night, with my vegetables and some of the tools in the wheelbarrow, I saw him watching me over the wall in back of his house, to my right. The wall was beautifully built up to shoulder level, and above that a few sticks propped up a couple of feet of chicken wire. The chicken wire gate hung open. The neighbor was standing inside, in weeds up to his chest.

"This," he said, "is my mother's garden."

"Oh, is it?"

"She has lettuces," he said. He reached down and pulled up a beautiful broad head of lettuce and handed it to me. "Here," he said. "And here's another." I protested. "That's pure ma-

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nure," he said. "She puts chicken, too. From those," he added, pointing to the red fowls waiting with the draggled white ducks in the lane. "She grows vegetables," he said—and words failed him for a moment. Then he raised one finger and shut his eyes and said, "Extra."

As I thanked him I said I imagined the soil must be very good in there. "Oh yes," he said. I asked whether they suffered from moles. "Oh—" he shook his head as at a proof of immorality. "It's disgusting."

"What do you do?" I asked. But he told me instead what you could do, and we went down the list, hoping that that would keep the problem at bay for the night. You could put a piece of bramble down the mole tunnel, the "gallery," leaving the thorns on, and then the mole would run into it in the dark and mole onto it and hurt its nose and go away. Some said that if you put onions into the galleries the moles went somewhere else, but the neighbor said he believed those sly beasts only made other tunnels around the onions, right away. He was sure of it. And they could do it faster than you could move. "They're sly, those sly beasts," he said. Then there was the plant. The mole plant. The neighbor's uncle had a mole plant and he never had a mole on his place. I said I had the plant, and the moles had come up under it and uprooted it.

"You can trap them," he said. "At one time they trapped them. With traps. In the tunnels. Everyone set them. That's the best. You can be sure that way. You can go with that."

I asked him whether he could do that.

"What?"

"Trap moles."

"Oh yes," he said, not believing it himself. And then there was poison. I asked whether they used poison. "Oh no," he said.

"There's gas," he remembered. He had heard that some used that, but he was not sure how they did it. "And rockets." Rockets appealed to him. "Say," he said, "it's like this. You take the rocket. You put the match to the end. Sssss! You put it in the tunnel. You stamp the ground down on top of it so it can't get out. Ssssss! Phoooo! It goes everywhere. Like a rocket. You

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see smoke coming up out of the ground over here, over there, over there."

"Have you seen it?"

"Oh yes. At my brother-in-law's. I saw it in the strawberries. My God."

"And is that what you use?"

"Oh no."

I stopped asking what they used. The chicken wire held up a few pea vines loaded with peas. He told me they grew by themselves. "We haven't put anything in here this year," he said. "I should do some work here. If I had time. Leeks," he said. "There are leeks." He pointed down through the long spring grass where I could make out rows of leeks fattening.

"Sometimes I work here," he said. "Sometimes my mother. She likes flowers." Several clumps of lush weed complete with soil and root flew through the gate into the lane, where the hens began to worry them. Tikou's ghostly barking beat at us steadily but without hope.

"Would you like some radishes?" I asked the neighbor, holding out a bunch.

"Oh, how beautiful they are," he said.

"Take them," I said.

"Oh no. One doesn't need them," he said, his eyebrows making a wild leap. "One doesn't need anything."

"You gave me those beautiful lettuces for my supper."

"That was a present. That doesn't count."

"It's a small return. It would be my pleasure."

"Well, after all—" but he didn't move.

"Do you eat radishes?"

"Oh yes," he said, firmly dispelling any notion that they might not eat radishes. But he looked doubtful. I held them out to him again. "It's very kind," he said, "but there was no need."

The hens broke and moved back down the lane to intercept the neighbor's mother who was arriving slowly dragging a small dead tree. We turned and watched.

"It's my mother," he said. "She's bringing some wood. For the fire." After a moment he asked, "Do you eat soup?"

I assured him that I did. His mother came up to where we

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were and stopped. She appeared to be in her seventies, thin, with a handsome narrow aquiline face, leathery, but hatched with deep white lines. Her head was constantly tilted backward so that she looked out along her nose from under narrowed lids. She was wearing a faded cotton dress that reached almost to her ankles, with an apron bleached to pale gray over it, and frayed sneakers without socks. Her gray hair was pulled back into a bun.

"It's my mother," he said to me again.

"Good evening, Madame," I said. We had already spoken when I had seen her passing in the lane. But she had never gone beyond returning my greeting. "Good evening," she said, as always, distantly, as though she were looking past me and might be greeting anyone at all.

"Look at that. What he has given us," the neighbor said, holding up the radishes.

"And your son gave me these beautiful lettuces of yours," I said to her.

"Oh yes, I gave him some lettuces."

"Oh yes," she said, her voice trailing off. "Good."

"One has too many," he said to us both, and to the world. I thought it the moment for formalities, and told her my name.

She nodded, narrowing her eyes further, and wiped her hand on her apron before shaking mine. Her hand was cold, like a chicken's legs. I turned to shake the neighbor's warmer, substantial hand.

"I'm called Michel," he said to me.

"Good evening," she said again, faintly, behind me, and started off, dragging the dead tree on to the corner of the building, the sound of scratching branches and of hens clucking after her suddenly cut off as she disappeared.

"She's going to make soup," Michel said. I said I must do the same.

"You make soup?" he asked. It seemed hard for him to believe.

"I eat what I've got," I said, pointing to the first peas beside the lettuces and radishes in the wheelbarrow.

"That's very good," he said, to say something, and I thanked

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him again and picked up the handles of the wheelbarrow, to be going.

"After all, we're neighbors," Michel said. "If you need anything."

"Thank you," I said. "And the same to you." And we nodded to each other and I took the same route his mother had taken, along the wall of the low building. It was set at an angle to the corner and formed one side of a kind of gateway into the open green. From the back it looked incongruous: a beautifully made wall built of dressed dry stone, with huge slabs for eaves not six feet above the ground, and a course or two of flat stones above those, giving way to an elaborate patchwork of overlapping pieces of rusty tin, old signs, lengths of sheathing and of stamped metal panelling, carefully laid, and held in place with rocks.

But the end wall, rising to a blunt peak, and topped all the way up with lapped flat stones, appeared to be perfect, and the facade, around the corner, made it plain that the building was very ancient, its real age beyond determining and its structure exemplifying a tradition that went back to the architecture of the Gauls.

Everything was built of stone. The eaves, at eye level, as on the other side of the building, were covered with similar slabs of flat stone, and the stones continued to the top of the roof, as on a pyramid. The facade was utterly simple: one door in the middle, a step below ground level. The ceiling inside, as I learned, was a stone vault. The building was what the family referred to as their cellar.

On the *causse*, in many places, it was all but impossible to dig cellars in the solid limestone that underlay most of the upland. If the houses were built out on the relatively level pastures an adjoining building was set in a few feet into the ground to hold the coolness of the earth, for a cellar. In many places the cellar was much older than the present house, and had seen several houses come and go with their owners and clothes and languages.

In the cellar they stored potatoes and hung carcasses, kept eggs and wine, cheese in flat baskets, sausages hanging from

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hooks. Each cellar had an intimacy of its own, like that of the family bedrooms. Only the family went there. Only the family knew what was in there. In the daily course of existence people did not pry into each others' cellars, and did not go along if their hosts went to fill a bottle. It was not altogether polite to stare into a cellar, any more than it would have been to stare at a bedroom window. This was particularly true of the neighbor's family. The cellar was full of what they needed.

Attics were another matter. Unless someone was ashamed of something in the past, attics simply represented storage of what was no longer needed. The owners could recognize it and laugh about it. The things people used to wear. The family knew what was in the cellar. They had forgotten what was in the attic, except perhaps for a cleared area where walnuts were dried, or grapes left to shrivel, to be made into liqueurs. In some houses the attic was simply a disused room on the ground floor, full of piled up furniture. No one from outside the family had seen into the cellar at the neighbor's house. But no one outside the family had seen the attic either, and few had stepped inside the front door. There was an invisible wall halfway between the chain link front gate set between columns of cemented *causse* limestone, and the doorway, which stood open in good weather if anyone was home. On summer evenings Michel could be seen sitting inside there at the table in the main room, which was called the kitchen. He was eating, or simply sitting. He waved. But if he wanted to talk he came out to the gate.

The house was much more recent than the cellar. Perhaps a couple of hundred years old, but it was hard to tell because it had been covered with make-up. The brother the roofer had replaced its dark mossed red tiles with bright red, modern, pressed, "mechanical" tiles. From the pitch of the roof it was plain that the house was not of an age to have been built, originally, with a roof entirely of stone. Thatch to begin with, perhaps, or the flat tiles—in either case with a few layers of flat stones along the eaves, at the base.

"It's more convenient," the brother the roofer, whose name was Robert, told me one Sunday, referring to the bright "me-

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chanical" tiles. We were standing outside the strip of chain link fence in front of the neighbor's house, on the green, with the ducks and sheep clattering among the stones behind us, nosing the curled grass and clover and calamint out from under the scrub sloe bushes and long gray velvet leaves of mullein. "It's more convenient. You can go with it." He leaned back in satisfaction against the wall of the stone oven, and looked at the roof. The stone eaves had gone, and the lips of the lowest tiles hung over the edge of the roof, above a new metal rain gutter.

"It doesn't fear the frost as much as the old kind," he said. "The old ones are good, though, if you put them on right," he added, slightly patronizing, straightening the visor of his peaked cap made of brown suiting material. The jacket of his brown suit was draped through the open window of his worn pale green car, in which the radio was playing softly. He was wearing a white shirt and his vest. He was not planning to tune up the car that Sunday.

He had brought out a few bottles of store wine from town. Michel was still picking pieces of chicken from between his teeth with his fingers. Robert's pale fiancée (as she was always called; her name was Martine), in a tight blouse, an aquamarine cardigan drawn around her shoulders, was standing with her arms folded, looking out at nothing over the green. It did not seem likely that they would be staying long. But meanwhile Robert gazed with approval at his handiwork on the front of the family house. A simple facade: a solid door in the middle, one window to either side, the woodwork painted brown. A fly curtain of strips of red and yellow plastic drawn back in the doorway. "The mother's" two pairs of white fantail pigeons came and went from a pigeon box tacked up under the eaves by the door. The massive flat polished stone set in the ground in front of the door was safely embedded in cement, which extended under the wooden threshold and some way into the room before the board floor started. And in front of the house where the old wall had been, only the stone foundation remained; above that the chain link fence now enclosed Finou's tile-roofed dog house, the pigeons' cement drinking

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dish surrounded by duck droppings, and a patch of "the mother's" hollyhocks, dahlias, and marigolds.

Robert shrugged. "As for the pitch, the roof didn't need to be so steep for the mechanicals," he said. "That was the way they built it for the old ones. But to change it? All the rafters? My faith! For that? And besides, one needs the attic." He sucked his teeth. "It's a good chimney," he said. "Doesn't smoke much. Oh, maybe when it blows from the south, like everywhere. But I don't like that roof the way it is around in the back there," he said, tipping his head toward the cellar. "It needs some work. It's old. My faith. The stones froze. With time. The cats live up there. It's better. For the rats. It was full of little bones up there."

"What kind of bones?"

"Every kind of bones. The cats took them, you know. New bones, old bones."

"That one," Michel said, pointing to a very small, stringy, whitish cat with thin fur, slipping out of the house and dashing along the wall toward the lane, "My God she's good for the rats. Oh! One has no rats, that's all. That's how it is."

"The females are the best," Robert said.

"You mustn't nourish them too much," Michel said. "Just enough."

I asked Robert what he would use to repair the cellar roof.

"Tin is cheapest," he said. "The undulated galvanized. I can even get it wholesale second hand."

"Yes," Michel said. "That's the cheapest."

"But it's not worth it, to put it up there," Robert said. "By the time you put up something to nail it to. You might just as well put up rafters and lath and do it in tiles. Old tiles. Even channel tiles. The pitch is better for channel tiles. But one doesn't pick them up so easily. Tiles are expensive now."

"Oh, they're expensive now," Michel said. "One has some saved," he added, with a sly, conspiratorial look. "There," he pointed to a walnut tree beyond the house. The brambles were head high underneath it and among the brambles I could make out the square bulk of a mossy stack of tiles.

"One keeps them," Michel said. "And one has more." And

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he remembered, "Have to stack them the right way. Or they freeze." He chopped the air with his hand. "Zero."

"They're falling all the time," I said, pointing across the green to the west, to another ruined shepherd's house like the one at the garden down the lane. It had stood there empty for as long as I had known the green and the parallel walls of its lanes trailing off in three directions over the limestone. Off to the east, to the ruin where I had to garden. To the north, all the way to the paved road, passing on the way another empty farmhouse under big lime trees, and then the home fields of M. Vert's farm, and to M. Vert's farmhouse, and beyond the farm and the road, on up the hill through the woods, past ruins, ruins. And to the west past the great half-ruined half-restored farmhouse where I was living, and on out between pastures to another empty house among massive rocks, and more oak woods.

Every year I watched the shepherd's house on the green move farther into decay. When I first saw it one could peer through a crack in a shutter on the south and through another on the west, and see that it was full of furniture. There, emerging from the night of the room, were the ends of machine-made nineteenth century high beds with headboards, footboards, lathed wooden globes on square columns at the corners, the old wood varnished, the varnish blackened like tires. White lace bedspread. White opaline glass kerosene lamp hanging from a beam. I thought it would be wonderful to be inside, to see it. But I saw it through the shutter. There was one room. I saw the end of a table, part of a shelf over the fireplace.

The house sat back inside its wall, which ran along the green and turned a corner. The sheep barn that had accompanied the house had dissolved into a pile of stones on which the hound's-tongue and stonecrops grew in the spring, and the neighbor's sheep rattled and browsed in the first evenings of summer. The walnut trees that had stood near the house had died. A few cherry trees still lingered, with dead branches and yellow leaves. A small stone out-building at the entrance, per-

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haps a cart shed or goat shed or hen house once, was no longer anything but an enclosure, the roof long since gone. The owners had taken its tiles to repair the house roof, which in turn was falling. On nights of storm and wind I could hear tiles slide down the roof and smash on the ground, and the rain would come down harder afterwards. At times on still nights a tile would let go and grate its hoarse way down the roof and crash like splashing water, leaving the green startled and dark.

On the stone above the door the date 1819 had been chiselled, with a heart upside-down above it. A date meant nothing. It could have been put on at a later time. Or the stone could have been brought from an earlier building. But that looked to be about the date of the house. Talleyrand's Europe. The local pieties of the time. Some of the same bells are still ringing.

"Too bad they don't fix that," I said.

"It's the family," Michel said. "Can't do anything."

"All that furniture," I said.

"I don't know," Michel said. He accompanied his sheep in there around the house almost daily, as though it were a home pasture, to M. Vert's disgust. The grass was cropped short among the fallen stones and tiles, right up to the walls.

"They can't reach an agreement," Robert said. "There are four or five heirs. The children. They're old. Some are in Tulle, I believe. Some are in Limoges. They never got along. They came here once a few years ago to reach some decision about the property. They couldn't. They argued. The wives argued and the husbands argued. One of them said that if the others reached an agreement he wouldn't. So they left it. And now he's in an asylum." He turned to look at the house. "They'll die."

"But the house will fall down."

"That may be," Robert agreed, with a resigned sigh.

The empty house along the lane to the north was also the property of aged heirs who lived elsewhere.

"The old man," Robert said, "is in a home. He doesn't know anything. And the sisters can't do anything. They've tried. He

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won't let them do anything. It's the law. They don't want to live here, I don't think. But they can't do anything with the place."

"The roof is still good," Michel said. Robert rocked his head from side to side, expressing doubt.

"Oh yes, it's good, it's good," Michel insisted.

"The cistern is good," Robert allowed.

"It's clean," Robert said. The sheep did not go in there, much. The grass was thin in the shade of the big lime trees which on spring nights scented the lane and the green and the fields around. Along the boundary wall between that property and the neighbor's was an arbor built of long split chestnut vine stakes, with grapes trained along the top—a rare sight on the *causse*, where relatively few grapes were cultivated and arbors were almost never used. Another arbor had been built in the neighbor's side of the wall, and the vines had grown together.

"It gives good grapes," Michel said.

"They're sour," Robert said. His fiancée made a face and laughed and turned away.

"For wine," Michel said. "One can make wine. But one doesn't need it. One has made it," he persisted. "Eh?" he asked Robert.

"Oh yes," Robert agreed.

"It was good," Michel said. "Last year it wasn't good. It rained too much. Not good. But I don't need that. I drink water, I. Cistern water. It's better for the health." He patted his solid middle.

I asked whether they had any idea of the age of the lime trees.

"They're old," Michel said.

"My mother always saw them," Robert said. "And my father. My grandparents. They were always there. They always gathered the flowers and dried them, for tea."

"But we have our own," Michel said. "Lime trees. We have several, if we need them. At the other house." He made a sweeping gesture toward the east, referring to the ruin that was my other neighbor, when I was in the garden. It stood a few

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hundred yards beyond the narrow end of the garden, there on the next hill, which had been part of the same ridge until the railroad cut had been carved through the upland a century before. There was still the carcass of a much larger farmhouse than the one Michel and his mother were living in. The sun rose beside it out of the line of dark oaks on the shelving *causse*, and the moon hung above it and its tall thinning lime trees. I knew better than to ask about it directly. One day when we were standing at the bend of the lane, looking at it across the slot of the railroad cut, Michel confirmed what M. Vert had already told me.

"It was burned down," he said. "And the barn. Everything."

M. Vert had said that one of the children had burned it down, when left alone in the house for a minute. "What could you expect?" he said.

"Does anyone know how it happened?" I asked Michel.

Michel shrugged. "Matches," he said. "An accident." He paused, looking at it. "It was before I was born. They say it was my other older brother, the one who died. My sister was looking after him, but when she wasn't looking—what do I know. That's what they say." He added darkly, "Other ways it could have happened too. There were people who would have been glad to have it burn down."

In one ruin I had found a pressed pewter plaque embossed with the figure of a crowing rooster and the name of a fire insurance company, and I inquired vaguely about insurance, more or less as a formality, feeling I knew the answer.

"Oh no," Michel said, rejecting the very idea. "It was not insured. There was no insurance in those times. It burned, that's all."

"And," he added, "there were no firemen. Firemen? Ha! My faith. What was there? The spring, there, at the bottom of the hill. That's all. It burned."

He said it without passion, finally. A fact. A bit of history that he knew.

"One has thought of rebuilding it," he said. "Yes. Fix it up. New. The walls are solid in spite of everything. But for the moment one doesn't need it."

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He stood looking at it across the cut.

"It's a terrible place for lightning," he said, with a gesture as though he were shaking water from his hand. "Ho! You see that lime tree? All dead the one side? That big lime tree? That's the lightning. I heard that myself, in the night, the storm. I came down the next morning and saw it like that, half of it gone. And that one there, almost dead all one side? That's the fire, still. Look at that. My God. If there is one place in the whole corner where the lightning strikes, it's there. If it's going to fall anywhere that's where it falls, that's where. It had its own cistern too."

As we stood looking at it, to the east, the tracks out of sight below us began to ring faintly in our ears, and then the train appeared around a rise in the *causse* that did not look like anything at all but clearly the rest of the world was back there. The train was travelling fast, westward, on its way, ultimately, to the river and the north. Only two cars, yellow. The sky full of the luminous clarity after sunset, all the glare gone. The train approached, snaking along, rushing, clicking, clacketing. We stood watching the house across the cut while the roofs rushed past below us and were gone, and the bushes blown by the wind it raised were still again.

That was another of the sounds of evening. There was a train that went east and south late in the afternoon. I scarcely heard it coming through the cut, when I was in the garden, until it emerged with a sudden loud burst and raced for the dip around the far corner. From the garden, or the bend in the lane, or anywhere on the lane, only a small section of track could be seen. The train had to appear, to show where the tracks ran. The inhabitants of the *causse* knew the times of the trains as they knew the days of the week, or the seasons.

Living on the upland with its long swells and hollows and deep abrupt ravines and its caves leading to underground streams and caverns, another tracery of thoroughfares gradually emerged from beneath the railroad and the one paved road. Many of the lanes were overgrown or partly overgrown, or had been amputated here and there to open the way for some use of machinery. But they resumed their routes farther

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on, winding through country that had become secret. The green had once been an intersection, with its three branches. The lane from the south had come in below the bend, at the spring, and had gone on to the north from there and joined the northern lane from the green, up on the hill that now looked back on M. Vert's farm. The lane that led past my garden and its ruined shepherd's house, and circled the hill to the east, and around past the spring and out across the *causse* through the woods, was a bit of the old Roman road, built by the legions after the defeat of Vercingetorix on a hill overlooking the valley, less than ten miles away. It was the Gauls from these uplands, woods, valleys, mountains, the Cadurcii and Arvernii, who had been rounded up after the battle and had their right arms cut off by Caesar's orders, in the name of civilization. After destroying the language and culture, the Romans too had crumbled, leaving a legacy of admired abstractions. Their presence was more remote than that of the far older hunters from the days of the painted caverns under the *causse*, some of them still unlisted on any map or registry. There were a number of entrances to that dark dripping world within a mile or so of the garden.

When I worked in that garden I was living in the one other house on the green apart from Michel's and his mother's, and the empty 1819 house full of furniture, from which the tiles slid through the nights.

The first time I had come to the green, years before, I had walked alone up the lane from the east, past the ruin and the storm of brambles that would be my garden, and had picked my way past the fallen stone buildings until the wide grassy space opened suddenly in front of me like a hidden valley, but level, running out to its written lines of walls and the black clouds of trees. I did not see the big house to the south of the green at first, behind its huge walnut tree. That first time no dogs barked, and I was accompanied onto the green by silence, and was almost half way across before I saw the tower to my left, the massive square shape climbing past the walnut limbs.

Years later when I saw it next, M. Vert led the way down the lane from his own farm. It was a building he wanted to show

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me, he said. He hadn't decided what to do with it. Coming to the green from the north, down the narrow lane with walls four or five feet high on both sides, the tower beside its walnut tree was the first thing one saw. The tower roof had dark holes in it, and two ominous cracks forked like roots down the walls. Part of the house roof behind the tower had begun to sink. Some of the rafters had gone. West of the tower the high wall that was one end of the house faced directly onto the green, with no windows. It narrowed at the top to a broad stone chimney.

M. Vert walked and talked with the same rapid flapping motion, like a rooster running, and he looked up as he spoke, and twitched his right cheek for emphasis and exclamation. He led the way to the entrance, a five-bar chestnut gate held in iron rings that in turn were set in the big stones of the opening in the high wall that ran straight along the whole south side of the green, which was shaped like a bow. The gate was beginning to show signs of rot and frailty. He opened it with difficulty, lifting the wooden bar out of a hole in the stone and carrying the gate inward onto the tall mixture of grass and meadow flowers. The big walnut tree stood in a raised enclosure, a walled platform, to our right, as though it were rising from a stage. And on the other side, to our left, in a grove of lacquer trees, rose a slope of broken stone, a dry glacier flowing around the stone doorways of several collapsed barnyard cubicles. A stone hill, with a flat top edged with vertical stones. He told me it was the threshing floor. It was one of those things that one is told and hears but does not attend to at the time, and only later notices and remembers.

He repeated to me that this was the house where his mother had been born. The courtyard sloped down from the gate. We walked in through the chest-high flowers. To our right the house ran along, south from the tower. All of the side of the roof facing us had begun to subside, a slow lurch. Beside the tower a long stone porch, a *bolet*, embraced the house, at the top of a flight of huge stone steps. The house roof had slipped over it like a hat on someone asleep. Under the *bolet* was a low stone arch, the entrance to a vault.

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I saw it little by little. It was not safe to go in then. Because his mother had been born there, he said, he was reluctant to take the tiles off the roof. But it was not of use to him. We talked about how it might be fixed up; and later, as a mason from the valley, with trucks and assistants, jacked up the roof, replaced rafters, wrapped the tower in a harness of iron straps and bars and covered it with an ugly coat of cement which was supposed to help hold it together, I watched the work and came to know the house well, as it was then.

The courtyard, I learned, was paved with immense stones three or four feet across. The house sat at one end of its enclosure which ran the whole length of the green. In front of the house was the courtyard and then the raised threshing floor which divided that end of the enclosure from the grove of plums, lacquer trees, walnut trees and acacias beyond it. Running through the brambles in the middle of the grove was the low wall that had once surrounded a garden. A hollow deep in the shade, that was damp until mid-summer, was all that remained of what had once been a shallow spring. It might still be there if one dug down. There were two entrances to the house: one, double width, facing the courtyard at ground level, and the other at the top of the flight of stone steps, where one door had opened onto the stone porch and a second one had opened from the stone porch into the house.

Around the south corner of the building, under a tangle of brambles, was one more stone oven, built against the stone end of the house. The oven itself filled the few feet between the house wall and the wall that bounded the stony field to the south. The familiar shape: at waist height, set on a pedestal of stone, a broad stone shelf. In the middle of the ledge the dark half-circle that was the oven opening. The twelve feet or so in front of the oven was deep in rubble, and it turned out that here too M. Vert had removed the tiles and rafters of a roof and carted them off, years before, throwing the rest of the rubble into a square stone duck pond that had been cut with great labor, at one time, into the stone of the upland, outside the ground floor entrance to the house.

I was curious about the oven because it appeared to be a

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later addition, something that had been added long after the house itself had been built there, part of some rearrangement, whereas many of the ovens on the *causse* looked far older than the houses near them. Many of them stood alone like solitary cells, separate from other buildings—a precaution, no doubt, against fire, for they were heated by stuffing them with dry brambles which burned with a wild riotous rush. The ovens enclosed under roofs had wide chimneys built above the openings, and the faces of the stones or bricks above the ledges were still black or burnt red from the fires.

There must have been many redistributions within that house's enclosure during the centuries that the building had stood there, and I wondered whether there might have been another oven there at one time, within the walls, but I never found any sign of one. Some ovens had been used communally, and I wondered whether the occupants of the house had once used the other ancient oven nearby, over on the green facing Michel's cellar. That one stood by itself, massive and dark, and apparently in perfect condition. A vine ran along the south side of it.

"It's solid," Michel said. "We take care of it. It still works, like thunder. We still use it."

"Do you?" I asked. I had seen the baker's small delivery van come picking its way over the rocks of the lane, setting the dogs barking, and had watched Michel or his mother carry into the house several heavy round *tourtes* of bread, to set in the rack hanging from the black beams.

"Not often, now. From time to time. If we want to."

M. Vert said that the oven on the back of the big house was the only one there had ever been, inside the enclosure, as far as he knew.

A huge acacia, dying now, reached its gnarled limbs out over the ruins of the oven and the choked duck pond. A grove of plum trees ran from the duck pond to the south wall of the enclosure, and then along to the trees by the threshing floor. In the early spring when the whole region was white with clouds of plum blossom the courtyard of the house was filled with its own shining cloud, floating below the still bare limbs

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of the walnut trees. The nights were still cold then, and even on sunny days the broad sky of the uplands was hung with drifting veils. Both orioles and nightingales haunted the trees beyond the threshing floor, and in the half ruined house chaffinches and redstarts had found corners in which they had nested. The mason changed his plans to avoid the nests until the young birds had flown.

It was a stone place. Built on stone, of stone. The air inside was the air of stones. The house had four stone arches. The first, outside under the stone porch, the flattened arch built of big stones, like the span of a bridge. The base of the tower held one end of it and the foundation of the stone staircase held the other end. Through the arch, in the house wall, was the stone lintel of the heavy, oak, iron-strapped, double door to the cellar, studded with hand-forged diamond-headed nails an inch across.

The cellar, like the tower, indicated that the house had been a place of some importance. The room had been dug into the rocky *causse* almost to chest level, and the whole square, some eight or ten paces each way, was roofed with a stone vault—the second of the arches. Inside stairs led up to the next room, the one off the courtyard. And that room, like the courtyard outside, was paved with huge stones, each more than one step across. The kitchen, M. Vert called it—which was the name for any main room with a fireplace.

And on the south of the room, facing the door from the cellar, was the fireplace: immense, occupying most of that wall. The opening was some ten feet across, and I could step inside it, under the mantelpiece made of a single piece of stone, without having to bend my head more than a little. Two pieces of stone, kin to the mantelpiece, formed the ends. Inside, looking up, the stone shaft, draped with waving cobwebs, narrowed and filled with light. I was happy to discover that the dimensions of things in the house bore no consistent relation to the metric system.

In the embrasures on each side of the fireplace, high up on the wall, was a small window. Under the one on the left, at waist height, a deep stone ledge crossed the embrasure, and

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below it the face of the stone was pierced with a half-moon opening like a small oven door. That was the ash box, built into the fireplaces of the region so that someone, at bedtime, could shovel the last of the fire into it and cover the coals with ashes. In the morning they could be dug out, still glowing, and start the next day's fire. The other embrasure, like the one down at the ruin, had been for firewood.

To the west, facing the entrance door and the courtyard, was the third arch, a perfect vaulted recess with a minute window in the end of it, well below eye level, another stone ledge around the sides, and a shallow stone sink set in the floor. That was the *évier*—the whole arch was the *évier*—where the dishes were washed. In the right-hand wall of the arch a low doorway led into a low-vaulted room, the fourth arch. Another cellar, or a larder, a cave made for some use that was later forgotten. Carefully sealed and, as M. Vert said, "deaf."

Inside the entrance from the courtyard another flight of stairs led up through the wall to a door into the room off the stone porch. The stairs made clear one of the peculiarities of the house: the north rooms and the south rooms were not on the same level, so that one climbed through the house as one climbs a staircase with landings. Had the two ends of the house been built at different times? There was no way of telling. It had housed two families, that was certain. The room at the top of the stairs was, once again, as M. Vert said, a "kitchen." Facing us across the floor was another huge fireplace, the twin of the one on the floor below, with a stone ledge and ash box to the left. The chimney was the one that could be seen from the green.

Stone steps through an opening in the wall led up to a loft, on two levels; and above that, beside the tower, the bedroom with a low door leading into the pigeon loft.

When I lived there a big dormer window, like the upper door of a haybarn, looked out from the lower loft, across the pastures, toward the line of woods and the minor valleys leading down to the river. I spent part of most days up there, by that window. Directly below the dormer was one side of the rough domed roof of the abandoned oven. The wall that ran

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beside it continued to the west, leading out from under the window to divide fields, with walnut trees at intervals all the way along it as far as it could be seen. They were middle-sized walnut trees, not giants like the one on the other side of the house, over the courtyard, which must have stood there for at least two centuries. It was one of the old *corn* walnuts of the *causse*, a variety which was no longer considered economical, though the nuts had the sweetest taste of all. They were too small, and the shells were too hard, for the wholesale trade. They were for local consumption, for cracking on the corners of the long walnut kitchen tables in the autumn evenings. Some of the trees along the pasture wall were of more saleable varieties such as the *candelou*, more recent than the *corn*, planted probably in the latter part of the nineteenth century, perhaps during the flurry of change that accompanied the coming of the railroad and the levelling of the road across the *causse*. Walnuts had been planted along many of the roads at that time.

The dealers in walnut wood still knew the lineages of the trees and their value for purposes that the trees had never considered. They knew the individual walnut trees for miles around, and could point to majestic ancient individuals standing alone in plowed fields and say that they were worthless. They had frozen. Water had found its way down through a fold and had frozen and cracked the trunk.

Then there was the color of the wood, and all the rings of ritual and dogma surrounding it. The wood of a green tree had no color, and you could not simply cut down a healthy tree in the field. To get the real color, the dealers agreed, you had to wait until the tree began to die. It would take three years doing it, and you could cut the tree at almost any time during that period, though there was an art to choosing the best possible moment. Once the tree had died completely, if it had not been cut it would begin to turn gray, and would lose its color completely.

The wood merchants carried long augers with which, with the owners' permission (at least in theory), they could pierce the tree and see the colors of the wood in order. Core samples.

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You could get the law on them if you caught them drilling your tree without your permission. It was not good to have a tree pierced too often. Too many samplings could ruin the wood, or start the tree dying. And of course there were pirates who went around piercing trees without asking permission, and then came back with low bids for the wood. You had to watch out for them if you had trees above a certain size. Another thing that would kill a tree was *the ink*, a kind of disease that seemed to combine cancer and hemophilia; the whole family was prone to it. Its chief symptom was a black liquid that seeped out of the trunk near the ground, and out of roots near the trunk, darkening the surface of the ground with black bloodstains. The nuts went on forming in the great canopy overhead. A tree with *the ink* was dying, and it might have color or it might not, depending on when the disease had got its hold. The disease too could be diagnosed with an auger. And the tree pronounced valueless, while the owner stood by unable to argue.

Throughout the country the older inhabitants spoke of a general decline in the vigor, productivity, and health of the walnut trees, which were a kind of unofficial totem of the region. *The ink* was a symptom of the falling away. The ailment had not been common, the elders insisted, when they were children. In their grandparents' day it had been all but unknown. As they talked they would point to a dead tip of a branch high in a tree and say, "There." The first sign that another tree had been stricken and was doomed. There was a treatment for *the ink*, they said, but it was seldom worth the gamble. Digging the soil away from the roots out past the drip line of the tree, and then washing everything, roots and soil, repeatedly, with poisonous chemicals. They were suspicious of the process, found it alien and repellent, and took some satisfaction in telling of those they had heard of who had done the whole thing, without success. It was certainly a long labor and expense, and it was agreed that often it did no good at all, or merely added a few years to the life of the tree, and the wood may have been rendered worthless in any case.

The malady, and the insidious decline of the walnut trees,

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were ascribed to a variety of causes. Chemical fertilizers, poison sprays, the atomic bomb. But the suspect in the foreground was the tractor-drawn plow. Until the middle of the century, in most parts of the *causse*, plowing had been done with cows. Not oxen, usually, but the same red, long-horned, notoriously self-willed cows that supplied the rich milk on the farms, and the milk-fed veal, and the beef. Not cheese. The cheese was made of the goats' milk. The cows worked in pairs, with a wooden yoke lashed to their horns. Long nets, made by the inmates of the local prison, hung down over their faces to keep the flies off. The cows leaned toward each other when they were going uphill, or when the load was heavy.

Whoever was leading them carried a long slender rod about as tall as a man, often made of a hazel or willow shoot. The rod was not for striking the cows. If a blow was struck it was seldom heavy and was usually directed to land on the wooden yoke, clack, clack. The driver started the cows and urged them on with a deep belly syllable, something between an "E-e-e-e-" and a "U-u-u-u-," a sound that echoed the cow's bellow. And shouted "*arrière*!," rolling the *r*'s hard, to stop them and back them.

And that was the point, they said, talking of the walnut trees. When the cows were plowing a field near a tree, and the plow hit a root, the cows stopped. One freed the plow and one went on. When a plow drawn by a tractor hit a root it kept going and cut the root. One could not cut walnut roots with impunity. There were only two periods in the year when you could cut the limbs above ground—a few weeks in the spring, after the hard frosts but before the sap began its main rise, and in the fall after the sap went down and the leaves fell, but before the real freeze. Cut them at any other time and the tree might bleed to death or be so weakened that it would never recover, or would freeze and crack, and bleed away later. And the roots should not be cut at all. The tree might bleed into the field, unseen. The best roots were not far from the surface. When the cows drew the plow the share did not go very deep. Just below the surface. The old plowman would hold out his hand, pointing forward, palm vertical, to show the depth. But

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the tractor plow turned up the soil much more deeply. Too deeply.

And then there were the sheep. They used to spend much more time under the walnut trees. It stood to reason that the manure, and the urine, made a difference. Some places now the sheep never left the barns. The old *caussenard* sheep with the Roman noses, pop eyes and long legs, were being crossed with other breeds such as the Berichon, to provide thicker, shorter legs of lamb, or were being replaced altogether, in the brand new sheep barns, by breeds imported from the Netherlands or from as far as New Zealand.

M. Vert shook his head as he spoke of them, but it was partly out of envy. He said he would not go as far as some of the farmers he knew, or knew of. Their farms shocked him. Like factories. It took capital to do that. The first way you could tell those barns was by the smell. They stank like rotting fish. In the summer, downwind, you could smell them a long way off, their stench wiping out the hot fragrance of the *causse*.

It was the middle of the sixties before that smell began to creep in—the smell of the world that became real the moment you bought your train ticket to somewhere else. M. Vert had a second cousin with a farm like that, and a brother-in-law who was talking of one—a small one. It took much less land to do it that way, than to do it the old way, with pastures. You could build a barn. Buy the feed. Get used to the smell, which got into everything. On the open *causse* the droppings of the sheep smelled of sheep and of the stones and leaves. They were dropped in the pastures and in the lanes among the rubble of limestone, and they rolled into the grass at the feet of the blackberry canes, in a world of dogs and magpies and gates, and for the rest of the day they stayed black in the sunlight.

The new sheep barns, of course, were not built of stone with tile roofs, but of metal or prefabricated cement slabs. They might be several stories high, and there were wide-eyed conversations, indignant, revolted, among women at the fairs, talking of the delivery of lambs at Bordeaux, how they were flung out from the stinking hot hold of the ship in which they had travelled for weeks. Picked up by a leg or a handful of wool

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and thrown into the upper story of a truck, which drove them for hours and hours to the new barn, where they were unloaded the same way. And once they were inside they never saw the light of day again.

That was a minor part of the argument about the new "industrial" barns. The advocates dismissed it as sentimental. More serious was the fact that the operators needed water for their barns and for their slaughterhouses. The statistics differed depending on who supplied them, but they agreed that many thousands of sheep, over a period of months until they attained the desired weight, would eat, evacuate, and eventually bleed, and that the results would have to be removed continuously. And for this, the developers maintained, they must have water. It must come in clean, which was not difficult along the valley with its small clear crayfish streams winding through woods. On the downstream side of the new barns the current would emerge full of the warm contents of bowels, bladder and veins of lambs and sheep fattened on chemically souped-up feed. The fishermen along the river were opposed. The neighbors everywhere were opposed—as much to the smell as to anything else. The suppliers of feed, huge national networks, made deals with local individuals who had political ambitions. Delegates to the national assembly, officials at the prefecture, members of the local councils who raised sheep or simply sold them, and wanted to get ahead and needed a mortgage, whether or not they had already realized it. Representatives of feed companies initiated peasants in the modern hard sell, offering loans for building sheep barns, and for stocking and supplying them. The local *marchands de bestiaux* helped with propositions and threats. The main pressure was in the valleys, where big farms bordered streams near the river.

One rich peasant, M. Pouchou, whose farm was an entire hamlet with an ancient name, was among the first in the region to "convert" to the new factory production of sheep. He was already a local *conseiller municipal.* His one notable act in that office had been to slip through a permit for the demolition of a twelfth-century arch surmounted by a guard room

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and tower. The building had been an outpost of the great castle on the hill which dominated the site of one of Charles Martel's crucial battles with the Saracens. It spanned the one lane of a hamlet along a clear trout stream. The arch was too low for the trucks of the big feed companies or of the *marchands de bestiaux.* Demolition crews were brought in and worked rapidly on a weekend. The other *conseillers municipal* were not even aware that the permit existed, and the building was irreparably wrecked before they found that the document had been signed without proper authorization, and was invalid. At the next election M. Pouchou was elected mayor of the *commune.*

Once in office M. Pouchou demonstrated openly some of the methods that had put him there. He had built a slaughterhouse inside his three-story sheep factory and had been slaughtering his own lambs and sheep there for several years and shipping the carcasses by the truckload to the north, to the cities, to the supermarket chains and to the army depots. Several steps in the process, including running his own slaughterhouse by the stream, were not legal, and accreditation for the slaughterhouse was not popular in the neighborhood, partly because of complaints for miles downstream.

But within a few years, by underselling to chain stores in the nearby market towns, and by making deals for butchering with the local *marchands de bestiaux*, the private slaughterhouse had managed to render the neighboring municipal slaughterhouse financially unsound. The new mayor pressed not only for complete "regularization" of his own slaughterhouse, but for the closing for the municipal facility, which he claimed, with reason, was old-fashioned, inefficient, unsanitary, a structural hazard, and an economic drag upon the town that used it. He insisted that it would cost more to bring it up to legal standard than the dwindling use of it could justify. The municipal slaughterhouse was not, in fact, even in M. Pouchou's own commune, but in the one that adjoined it, to the north. But M. Pouchou's demands turned out to be part of a concerted campaign all through the region, which included among its backers not only "progressive" sheep enter-

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prises, *marchands de bestiaux*, and the huge feed companies, but figures in high positions in the national government. The sister of a cabinet minister, for instance, turned out to have a controlling interest in a supermarket chain that purveyed the "industrial" lamb, and to be the sole owner of an enterprise producing lambswool vests, coats, and hats for chic stores. One object of the campaign was to close all the municipal slaughterhouses in the region, and to have public slaughtering become the monopoly of a cartel of "industrial" meat producers directed by the feed companies. It was an attempt to seize the whole market in one move.

Signs of hidden influence behind the campaign began to emerge. The mayor of the town nearest to M. Pouchou, in which the public slaughterhouse operated, was a young doctor who was originally a vigorous opponent of the new industrial sheep barns. He argued against them publicly and privately, on grounds of health, the pollution of the streams, the smell, the predictable impression on the summer vacationers. He deplored the long-range effects on the region if the industrial sheep barns were to become established there. He spoke of the self-sufficiency, independence, and self-respect of local communities and of the region as a whole. Then for a season the doctor was silent on the subject. After which, one day, he was quoted in a newspaper, speaking at a rotarian meeting in favor of the "progressive" methods of sheep production, describing them as a rational approach to agriculture, in the great tradition of the nation; as an essential response to a hungry world's need for meat; and as a hope for the economy of a backward area, if only one were open-minded and prepared to take the broad view.

M. Pouchou represented a more obvious operation of influence. The *mairie* to which he succeeded occupied a couple of rooms with bare board floors (it was not many years since they had been bedrooms) upstairs over a grocery store that had just been acquired by a national chain. The store, until a few years before he took office, had been a shadowy, piled, sagging, dusty general emporium on the ancient square of a village with a population of perhaps seventy. A backwater, at the

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confluence of two brooks, and the square had become a backwater even in the village: most of the sparse traffic was along a winding road that skirted the ancient settlement instead of passing through it. Everything on the square was small and venerable, built of limestone that had turned golden with age and the growth of lichens. One end of it was occupied by a Romanesque church, simple and unmarred, the fluted arch of its door resting on capitals whose intricate carvings had survived most of eight centuries. The facade at all hours and in all weathers seemed to be reflecting the sunset. A high wall next to it hid the cemetery. Another, along the far side of a lane that led into the square from the valley to the north, was the boundary of a plum orchard. The store faced the orchard, across the square.

And across the square from the church was the one remaining private house on the *place*, with a long stone porch looking out over dahlias, hollyhocks, roses, and an iron gate. There by the stone balustrade the present owners, a mason and his short round wife who wore her brown cardigan winter and summer, would sit at the end of a day's work and sip a glass of their own ratafia, and wave to friends passing by. M. Toronne, the mason, came of a line of artisans that receded into the history of the old buildings of the region. His father had been a man who walked to work every morning, however far, in his wooden shoes, with no leather slippers but simply a handful of hay stuffed inside them. His father had been famous as a builder and repairer of vaulted ceilings, and had been the best cutter of dressed stone for miles around. He had refused to learn to read, regarding it as a foolishness and a waste of time.

M. Toronne, son, had not followed him in that. He read two local and two national papers, the pubication of a regional historical society, a magazine devoted to original views of health and diet, and a farmers' almanac. He kept his glasses in an old case inside the cookie tin. And he saw no reason to deny himself woolen socks inside his iron-shod *sabots*, or the occasional admission that the knee, broken years before in a soccer game, was giving him trouble because of the damp. But in other respects he had yielded little, and was proud of it. He

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was leaner than his father, not so massive but just as sinewy. He was proud to be the mason preferred by the Beaux Arts in that whole area, for delicate restoration of ancient churches and medieval architecture. He said he knew every feudal structure in the region and had each one in his head. He saw no point in owning a cement mixer. His *commis* or his apprentice could mix the cement better by hand, set the mixture just right for a particular purpose, and learn something as they did it. In any case *béton*, concrete, in his vocabulary, was regularly employed as a term of contempt, describing ugly, mass-produced contemporary work done by the square yard, and the mentality that preferred it. He reserved his respect for stone, and for oak and chestnut, which he referred to without hesitation as the noble materials. He worked on modern *villas* built of hollow bricks, on occasion, but shrugged and described them as imbecile, which was what he also called the woman antique dealer's small imitation chateau with its yellow glass mullioned windows, wrought iron grilles, and round towers, which he had commissioned him to build along the road within earshot and smelling distance of the beleaguered municipal slaughterhouse. And now there was a firm of architects and contractors, not even from the region, from whom you could buy plans for an "antique" villa that looked like a chateau. You could choose among four different models.

The work crew, for one of those, was included in the contract, but prospective future chateau owners who had grown up in the region, or newcomers who had made careful inquiry, often came to enlist M. Toronne's service, if only as a consultant. "To be sure," M. Toronne said, without specifying what it was that they wanted to be sure of. He was not above giving them civil advice, but the structures were false, everything was false, and he was disgusted and preferred to have nothing to do with such operations. He said he would rather take small jobs building grave vaults or repairing family tombs in cemeteries.

And he sat in his socks and sucked in his cheeks and railed, in his hoarse tenor, at the military jets that had been breaking the sound barrier, for several years, over that part of the coun-

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try. They were cracking the old stone vaults everywhere, he said. They were destroying the churches. The cathedral of Stuttgart would never be the same. They were making the stones from the seven-hundred-year-old castle on the hill, within sight of his porch, roll down onto the roofs below. They were imbecile too. "No, no, and no!" he insisted, shaking his head furiously, as he did when an apprentice did something he disapproved of. "Striking force!" he said, with a snort, using the phrase with which the government described its new military build-up. He had nothing but contempt for the military. He was one of a number from the region, several of them artisans, who had been deported by the Germans in the Second World War, and had escaped and made their way home and obtained false papers and fictitious disabilities, and had served in the resistance with signal effect, until the Germans were gone. He had not mellowed toward the Germans and had no wish to see any of them return to the region as summer visitors "no matter how much money they spend." Yet he shunned war veterans' reunions, which he also described as imbecile. As for the army, he referred to it generally as imbecile. In the war, he said, the military had been pompous sellouts and cowards, and now all they could do was talk big, waste money, destroy ancient monuments, and frighten flocks of sheep. They had not changed a bit.

He railed when the shadowy fifteen-watt general store, his neighbor, had its wooden casements with their small panes torn out, and a single pane of glass put in instead, though at least the Beaux Arts had insisted that, since the church and everything in front of it was a national monument, the glass must be set not in cement but in stone. M. Toronne had been disgusted, the day he came home and saw the new chain grocery further defaced with a huge red sign half the size of the building, and he had got the Beaux Arts to force the chain to replace it with a small discreet row of gold capital letters.

He spoke with the same forthrightness that he used for the army when the subject turned to M. Pouchou, the new mayor, and the move toward "progressive" sheep barns, which M. Toronne referred to as factories unless he called them *Dachaus.*

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He knew the pressures, the threats, the deals, that had won M. Pouchou the mayoral office, and he sat on his porch in the evening and snorted over his paper the day he came home from work and saw that they had begun to decorate the square for the ceremony at which the new mayor would be invested with his office. He glowered over his spectacles at the familiar strings hung with little red, white, and blue paper flags, that were dangling here and there, attached but not yet finally in place. They were draped from the brackets over the white enamel shades like tin plates, above the bulbs of the two light poles on the square. And from the limbs of a walnut tree that reached out over the orchard wall. And from the front of the church, and out of the windows of the *mairie* itself, which was bibbed with gathered red, white, and blue bunting which fell at the sides to frame the plate glass window of the grocery store as though it were a stage. He observed, above his newspaper, the platform set up in front of the *mairie*, and dropped his eyes in disgust.

On the day of the ceremony he took his wife calling on friends in the country, in the truck, driving out before any of the officiants had turned up, before the cars began to edge to a stop by the ditch at the bottom of the street, or the volunteer firemen's band had arrived, in uniform, for their *aubades* and procession.

And M. Toronne was tireless in spreading the news far and wide when the new mayor, almost immediately upon his investiture, set up a schedule of compulsory hearings, requiring every resident of the commune who raised sheep for meat, and every *exploitant* of agricultural acreage, to come in alphabetical order, at fixed times on fixed days, to appear, one by one, before M. Pouchou himself and three of his cohorts seated behind the desks of the *mairie* as at the bench of a tribunal. And there the *exploitants* were to declare themselves for or against the closing of the municipal slaughterhouse and the official sanction of a private slaughterhouse owned by M. Pouchou, to fulfill its functions. And they were to affix their signatures accordingly, before these four witnesses, one of whom had been made a notary public for the occasion.

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The schedule of hearings, with names and times filled in by hand, was posted weekly on the door of the *mairie*, upstairs, and the announcement suggested onerous and costly consequences for anyone who failed to cooperate.

There were two small cafes at the bottom of the one winding street, with a stream and the open fields across the road from them, and another small general store a few houses farther along. On the first morning of the hearings the cars began to arrive and pull off the road a little hesitantly, as for a funeral. And the *exploitants* and proprietors, men, women, and their seconds—sons, wives, brothers, sisters-in-law, grandsons, climbed out. Many of the cars were veterans: tall as cupboards, black, green, brown, rusted, a spare tire on one running board, a battery on the other, a crate lashed to the luggage rack behind. And more than half of the *exploitants* were of the generation that, as they themselves put it, had "made the '14 war." Gaulish moustaches, gray and stained orange; the wide, new-looking berets reserved for Sundays, fairs, weddings, and internments; corduroy jackets, black sateen jackets, striped black trousers. Women with round red faces, in straw hats. They all stood for a moment by the edge of the road, in groups, looking around as though they were strangers to the place, when in fact none of them had driven more than a couple of miles, and they were joined, as they stood there, by neighbors who had come on foot. They stood and consulted watches, and ventured opinions as to what it could all mean, and bits of news, and careful information about the times of their appointments, every word of it in the language of the region that was older than French. And then they drifted into the store or the cafes, from which they emerged in twos or threes or singly, at intervals, to shuffle up the narrow street with its overhanging upper storeys, to the *place* and the *mairie*, where a small crowd formed through the course of the morning, as the bell in the church struck the quarters, and struck the hours, each time twice.

M. Pouchou was a large, burly man with heavy hands and a habit of bringing them down on the table in front of him to emphasize his sentences. Two of his companions at the long

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table were beefy, stolid presences with closed, inimical expressions. They said nothing. They nodded if M. Pouchou addressed a question to them. It never required anything but assent. They, like M. Pouchou, kept their hats on. They were wearing berets, and he a gray pork-pie. Outside, on the square, those who had been dismissed discussed the identities of the two heavy individuals. One had been employed by M. Pouchou for years and was currently the head butcher at M. Pouchou's sheep barn. The other, who looked like his twin, was a more recent employee. Neither of them had grown up in the region. The third assistant, the notary, wore a white shirt and a suit, and typed parts of each deposition, asking the deponents to repeat themselves more slowly.

M. Pouchou spoke in the regional tongue part of the time, but used French with chilling effect when he wished to sound particularly lofty and official. He was menacing in both languages, and the procedure he had set up, the questions he asked, were designed to make each proprietor in turn feel that the object of the interview was not to solicit an opinion but to exact a justification. Some of the *exploitants* began with obvious doubt as to whether or not to keep their hats on. They were asked to name themselves, last name first. M. Pouchou had known most of them all his life. Then name their properties—on many of which he had played as a child—and their acreage, and the numbers on the tax map, and to produce evidence that they had paid their property taxes. The first days many of them had not brought the relevant papers and information with them. This was treated as a delinquency, and in some cases they were asked to return at a later date. That depended, clearly, on how they spoke of the subject in question. If any of them expressed the slightest misgiving or hesitation, M. Pouchou began to turn the screws.

It was easy to begin with taxes, if there was any irregularity there. The notary at the end of the table riffled through his files and produced evidence which M. Pouchou had gone to some trouble and expense to procure, concerning any other debts incumbent upon the property, upon the proprietor or other members of the family, and any loans outstanding to lo-

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cal banks, to neighbors, in some cases to M. Pouchou himself. Also indebtedness of other kinds, and any family disputes over title to all or to part of the property. Old ghosts that the *exploitants* had supposed to be long since at rest were hoisted up and paraded before them. And if M. Pouchou's researches had mined up nothing of the kind, threats of other sorts were invoked, including suggestions of violence to property or persons, the confiscation of land—whatever might be necessary.

It was a part of the world in which the German occupation during the Second World War had never really "taken" as they said. The local population, from the valley towns, the *causses*, the chestnut forests of the *segala*, bourgeois and peasant alike, had simply closed ranks, with notable exceptions. They had spoken their own language, fed themselves and each other on their own exchanged produce, and supported an extremely effective resistance movement on the *causse* and in the *segala*—a guerrilla band that was powerful, mobile, and coherent enough to maintain its own field hospital, radio station, and underground publication. The Jews in the towns had been adopted into farm families for the duration—there had been only a few dozen of them. A single local fascist collaborator had led the Germans to the ones he could learn about, and there were not many of those. Nobody on the *causse* knew anything. Nobody in the *segala* knew anything. The resistance managed to get gasoline. Its members ran cars, drove motorcycles, carried messages. They moved sheep, whole flocks of sheep, at night, when the Germans were due to show up to requisition meat in the morning. The owners had no idea what had become of the sheep.

"Don't you have sheep?"

"No."

"It says here you keep sheep. Don't you keep sheep?"

"Yes, when we have them."

"Where are they? What happened to them?"

"They were stolen. Every one."

"When?"

"It must have been in the night."

"How could they have been stolen?"

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"We don't know."

"You have dogs. Don't they bark?"

"Oh yes."

Then the searches. In one town the Germans machine-gunned every garage door one day, but it made no difference. The members of the resistance got everywhere, and kept the sheep out of reach of the Germans. When the Germans burned sheep barns, whole patrols disappeared on the *causse*. The remains were discovered at the bottoms of pot-holes after the war. For three years the *résistance* had three foreigners, English and American, up on the *causse*. Liaison officers. A number of peasants knew who they were. No one said anything. The officers arranged a parachute drop of arms and medical equipment onto a designated spot on the *causse*. The *résistance* had ambushes waiting beside all the roads.

It was a high, bare, open stony place. The wild aurochs must have roamed there in the days when the caves were being painted. A slightly domed tableland, at a point where the valley could just be seen, over the edge of the *causse*. Stones all around it, walls and standing rocks. Lanes leading off under small trees, past ruined stone barns and houses, through woods. On the morning, which was the 14th of July after D-day, the planes came over at the scheduled time, and the parachutes opened over the country of the cave bears and bison and vineyards overgrown with brambles. When the planes had gone and the chutes had collapsed onto the stones, peasants leading pairs of cows and heavy wagons emerged from the woods, from all sides of the bare tableland, where they had been waiting since the middle of the night. They gathered up the crates and parachutes and headed home with them in the carts, at the pace of the cows. The Germans were less than fifteen miles away. The resistance came by each farm and picked up what the carts had brought.

Days later, at the request of one of the liaison officers, a contingent of the resistance—boys, some of them, and old men; about forty of them, all told—were asked to delay a particular German troop movement that was heading north, led by an elite regiment. If possible, the partisans were to delay that

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regiment for three quarters of an hour. They agreed to try, set up an ambush at a narrow iron bridge at the outskirts of one of the towns, and held the bridge until the German tanks arrived—three quarters of an hour, losing a third of their number. They learned later that the troop movement was part of the German mass rush of reinforcements to the north to stem the Allied advance in Normandy; that there had been a tight schedule of troop movements because so many bridges were down and the number of places where the army could cross the wide rivers was limited. As they crossed, they were particularly vulnerable to attack from the air. The RAF had acquired part of the schedule of troop movements and knew that the regiment in question was scheduled to cross the Loire in the last hour of darkness. The delay meant that they reached the river after daybreak, had to cross in daylight, and the RAF was expecting them. Few of them, it was said, ever reached Normandy.

Most of the people of the region had not considered their own behavior during the war at all remarkable, even when they knew how people had behaved in other parts of the country, in the north, in cities. They were proud of their distance from cities, and always had been. They did not expect much from there. They said that they had acted as they had because that was what one did.

But M. Pouchou was from the region, and he managed to perturb them. They had known that the Germans were transients—it was a question of waiting them out. With M. Pouchou it was a different matter. They knew him, and he knew them. They remembered him as a boy. What he was like then. Already not so good. They had seen how he got his money together. Sly and ruthless and shady. Yet in conversations about him and about the sheep factories, sooner or later some original thinker was likely to suck his teeth, sigh, and conclude that you can't stop progress.

Which might mean that the speaker had already decided to evolve, as the saying went, with the times. To be modern, after all. To advance. And to profit by it. If only for the sake of the children. For the children.

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Or it might mean that the speaker saw no way out, and felt trapped by a process that was destroying everything that he knew and cared for and had believed in. Or that the speaker would not face the choice at all and used the words to shut it off, having picked up the phrase from earlier conversations. It was said with satisfaction, with disgust, with belligerence, with resignation, with hypocrisy, with grief, with raised shoulders. Nobody knew what progress was, but they all spoke as though they did.

And some said, "I'm glad my father never lived to see this day." Some who spoke against the sheep barns were wondering whether they could afford to install one. Some couldn't decide anything at all. If the barns made money for you, God knew you could use it. Some always wanted to try the newest thing. If there's money in it it's right. Some spoke deliberately about why they meant to do it. And some who railed against the whole thing voted for it when they were faced with the mayor and his assistants.

M. Pouchou's barn and his commune were in the valley, and the main resistance to his aspirations came from the *causse*, outside his jurisdiction, where each hamlet and each family had its traditions of sheep raising in the walled pastures, winter and summer, taking the sheep out to pasture, bringing them back, according to the season and the weather. The soil of the *causse* was far poorer than the valley soil. Sheep were more important to the inhabitants. But on the *causse* too opinion was divided. On the one hand those who resisted change or could not afford it, and on the other those who after all could not stop progress, and had no wish to if it meant money.

But the mayor of the commune on the *causse* nearest to M. Pouchou was actively opposed to his neighbor's ambitions and to his methods, both. He was among those who rallied political opposition in the prefectoral offices and the national government, to M. Pouchou's tactics, and the opposition succeeded, before the vote on the issue of the sheep barns was complete in M. Pouchou's commune, in bringing about a legal challenge to what M. Pouchou was doing. He was enjoined

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from proceeding. He declared that he would continue the legal battle, but he had been seriously delayed and his position had been shaken. The municipal slaughterhouse near him continued to operate, despite threats to those who ran it and to those who used it. M. Pouchou's private slaughterhouse was not officially sanctioned. Yet M. Pouchou went ahead with a new addition to his prefabricated sheep barn, with revolving fans on each floor. He stocked it, increased his feed orders, and schemed at the prefecture to acquire a permit to widen the road that led from the nearest feed supplier and rail center on the *causse*. The road was widened part of the way. Land was requisitioned to make it possible—the edges of vineyards on the slope, the lower fringes of plum orchards. Which did not endear him or his plans to the owners.

Widened or not, to reach M. Pouchou's commune and his farm the road had to cross a small stream, over a narrow stone bridge of unknown age. The *marchands de bestiaux*'s trucks could just barely squeeze through between the stone parapets. Some of the smaller trucks of the feed companies, of the proportions of medium-sized moving vans, could not get through at all, and others left paint and loosened stones at the corners. Both were above the permitted load limit. And the big semis of the feed companies could not even make the turn to get their cabs onto the bridge.

In the middle of the arch on one side was a recess, a walled bay set out over the stream. Nobody knew just why it had been built there—possibly to stand in if you happened to be walking across when a cart came by with a load of hay, filling the whole bridge. Or possibly for fishing. It was used regularly for both. And the boundary between the two communes ran down the middle of the stream and divided the bridge half way across, so that you could stand fishing in the recess with one foot in one commune and one in the other. M. Pouchou, continuing in the same role that had rid his own commune of the ancient fortified archway, applied for a permit to replace the bridge with a broad modern structure of steel and concrete. His neighbor, the mayor on the *causse*, not only managed to have the request denied; he declared that even if

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his neighbor were to succeed in widening his half of the bridge, he would keep his own half at its present width.

The feud was carried into a new phase the following winter when the stream flooded and part of the bridge was mauled by flotsam. The damage, in fact, seemed to be greater than the flood could account for. It was, after all, a small stream, and had flooded many times before in the life of the bridge. On the other hand it had been a fairly severe flood, the bridge was old and had cracks—particularly in the few years since the big trucks had been using it in defiance of the posted weight limits—and there was no clear evidence of the kind of deliberate human agency which was immediately suspected as soon as the damage was known. In fact, if M. Pouchou and his staff had contrived to lend the flood a hand at that spot, with a view to assuring the need for extensive renovation, their efforts backfired. The mayor of the *causse* had fostered some historic research into the history of the bridge which indeed proved to be older than anyone had supposed, though its exact date of origin was still unknown. And as soon as the bridge was closed because of flood damage it was fenced off and posted by a team of archaeologists from the capital with authority to keep it closed for as long as their purposes required. Their examinations went on for the rest of the winter and most of the spring, and the results pointed to greater antiquity than anyone had believed. The present bridge, they learned, had been built over a still earlier—and narrower—cobbled arch that may have been Roman. In any case, there was no question of its being widened or remodeled in any way, nor of its being used for further heavy traffic of any kind. It entered a new category in the index of national monuments, and received the corresponding surveillance of the national government. The feed trucks coming from the main warehouse next to the railroad station on the *causse*, on their way to M. Pouchou's barn, and the *marchand de bestiaux*'s trucks coming to his slaughterhouse would have to go round some twenty miles farther, along winding roads that had not been widened to suit them, and crawl behind flocks of sheep, cows, and loads of hay.

As the struggle wore on, the views of it on the *causse* grew

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more varied. The feed companies stepped up their campaign to encourage sheep raisers to develop intensive sheep barns. Representatives called at remote farms to suggest studies of the present methods of exploitation and point out how they could be improved. They worked in collaboration with banks and government advisory agencies. Loans could be offered for building modern steel barns of appropriate sizes, and for stocking them, and for feed. Of course the old walls along the lanes would have to be cleared away to allow the trucks to come and go.

For the most part it was the larger and more prosperous farms that received the special attention of the companies and agreed to smash out the ends of existing stone barns to extrude steel additions and make whatever changes were necessary for "progressive" sheep production. The owners included some of the best and most careful farmers in the region, families proud of their care of their land, which had been in the same names since before there were records. They had neighbors and friends whose tenancy was as old and as honorable who were unalterably opposed to the new form of sheep raising, which came to be referred to simply as "chemistry"—a term extended from the new agricultural techniques based on bag fertilizers and synthetic toxins.

But the conservative peasants too were being dragged into the use of these things year by year with the advent of machinery, which meant that they no longer worked in each others' fields and ate together at each others' tables on several working days each week. Nitrate of ammonia in the fields, for wheat. Superphosphate in the pastures. Then the old cooper knapsack sprayer that for decades had misted the vines with *bouillie bordelaise*—plain copper sulfate and lime, and "bad enough," as they said—against mildew, was filled with some new product that had leaked out onto the back of a man in a neighboring village and killed him. Cancer all down his back. They moved reluctantly, helplessly, resentfully into debt and the use of unknown forces that they had been told were bettering them and that they knew were taking them over and would obliterate them. They also were convinced that the new

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substances were insidiously threatening not only their physical health, their stamina and longevity, but their relation to the world, their lives. They scolded like crows about the spraying which they saw in the market gardens, even as they were herded into using chemicals, themselves, in the fields. They continued to grow their own vegetable gardens without the new products. The word "manure" took on the ring of the word "honor," and the notion that they would spray their own lettuces was rejected as though it implied incest.

And many of the more prosperous sheep raisers, those who had a hundred or more sheep all year round, took to dividing their sheep into two flocks. One, a commercial flock, raised intensively, or semi-intensively: largely or entirely indoors, on bought feed with additives, implants of hormones, and other novelties suggested annually by representatives of the feed companies or by the government advisors, both of whom came round visiting regularly, carrying samples, like salesmen from American drug companies. And the other flock, a smaller one, would be raised in the old way, out in the pastures for all or part of the day, into the barns only for shelter, or to be fattened at the end on wheat and fodder beets grown on the same farm, until the butcher took them away for local consumption, or shipment to particular butcher shops and restaurants in Paris. Occasionally one was butchered there on the farm and divided up among the neighbors.

And in the butcher shops and restaurants in the region mutton and lamb raised in the traditional fashion were plainly labelled "*Brébis du Causse*" in the window or on the menu, and the purveyors stood ready to prove their claims, and name the farms. No one wanted to eat the stuff from those barns that stank of rotting fish. "Have you read the labels on the feed bags?" they asked each other, shaking their heads.

Many small farms on the *causse* continued to raise sheep only in the traditional way. Some of them kept sheep only for part of the year, buying five or six ewes with lambs, two each, at the autumn fairs, fattening them on the autumn pastures, feeding them the summer's root crop, and selling the lambs in the spring, and the ewes sometime later. They spoke, as of

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a bedrock under all changes, of the eternal days before the way, when each family, they said, had had its own secret formula for feeding the lambs during the last weeks. Thyme and marjoram and carrot tops, and other things about which they remained mysterious. You could tell from the taste, then, which family had raised the lamb. But then, of course, they had eaten their own lamb, taking turns, one farm after another butchering and dividing it. Now it was like the work in the fields: it was no longer something that they all did together. Even the *brébis du causse* were all bought by the butcher in his truck, and "they" could have the law on you if you butchered your own sheep. Maybe the butcher promised to save you some, and maybe what he said was yours really was, but you could never be sure. Sometimes it had already been reserved for somewhere in Paris before the butcher even came by to pick up the living animals. In the sixties some of the larger farms, with two flocks, bought freezers which they paid for month by month, in which they could store their own traditionally raised lamb, or their neighbors', after the butchers had slaughtered it. Then the owners of freezers worried about the cost of electricity, about thunderstorms cutting off the power, about generators, and about rumors of new taxes on the freezers according to their cubic capacity. And those who clung to the traditional system railed against the Common Market, which allowed the mass importation of cheap factory-raised mutton from the Netherlands and elsewhere, just as the spring lambs from the *causse* pastures were ready for sale, so that the price of local lamb dropped until the whole of the winter's herding, and all of the chopping of beets by hand, went for nothing. "A few years like that," they said, "and we're ruined." They could not keep the lambs, they said. Once they had started fattening them they had to be sold. They could not come back off the fattening diet, and if they continued on it for too long they would simply get sick and die. So by a certain age they had to be sold at any price.

M. Vert and his methods carried on somewhere between the traditional and the "progressive" systems. He thought of himself as "evolved" and forward-looking. His house, on the road

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that crossed the *causse*, was not one of the ancient farmhouses, built on several levels, with towers and deep porches, that stood here and there, mostly in ruin, on the upland, and were clustered together like a sprawling chateau, in the village, with a population of twenty-two, three miles away. A farmhouse must have stood on the same spot for some time, but its existence was attested to not by the form of the present house but by the small ancient barn that M. Vert still used for hay, which sat back from the road some distance to the west, on a lane that diverged from the later road. It was not only the gray weathered stones of the barn that told of its age. It was their massive size, the great lintels and sills and corners, the amplitude of his proportions, the way it sat in the size of a hollow, with one of its doors facing an upper level and one a lower enclosure of grass sunk in towering brambles—what must at one time have been a barnyard. Beyond that, to the east, was one of the old dew ponds that dotted the *causse*: hollows that had been scraped out of the bare sloping rock, and cobbled in the crevices and along one side, so that they would collect rain or dew. The road that ran past it had been paved for less than a decade, and Muscovy ducks still dabbled and paddled in the green muck, ignoring the occasional cars.

M. Vert was a hurried man, with an obsession for gainful employment. He did everything without a moment to lose, so that he could be doing the next thing. All of his motions were rapid and upward, sudden leaps against the law of gravity: the gestures of his hands, the way he flung up his chin, his cheeks, or one corner of his mouth. He walked as though he were jumping a series of puddles. Any old stones left undisturbed made him feel that something in his own life was running to waste. He was impatient to find a way of turning them into some new profitable purpose of his own devising. He talked of removing the tiles from the roof of the old barn to use them on a new extension of his own traditional sheep barn. It was that or a metal roof, which might be best after all. If he took the tiles off, then he could use the stones for the wall of a new barn.

M. Vert's passion for moving stones led him to feel it as a

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personal triumph each year when the government sent machinery to "reclaim" a few more square miles of *causse*, bulldozing the rocks and outcrops as well as the thickets of sloe bushes, the tangles of brambles and eglantines, the may trees, the scrub oaks and bird cherries, marjoram, thyme, honeysuckle, box, bulbs of autumn crocuses and bee orchises, pushing them all into piles, rubbing out the long lines of walls around fields and pastures and along worn lanes, and scraping the lanes away. Once I came back from an absence through which I had remembered each wall and tree to find that M. Vert had got the reclamation crew to bulldoze and grade away the stones of one of the high walls along the narrow winding lane from the paved road near his house to the green. It had been replaced with posts and five strands of barbed wire.

He modernized, using the materials that he moved from other places. His own house had been built that way. The original structure must have been small—like the old barn along the road. One or two rooms at ground level. Perhaps only the room with the fireplace, on the wall nearest the road: the kitchen and entrance, the first room you came to now as you passed through the gate. It had all been rebuilt in M. Vert's time, by his own efforts, in the first years of his marriage. The wall along the road had been tumbled and remade using stones from nearby buildings, everything set with mortar this time, and the whole thing topped with a broad cap of cement in which a series of lengths of galvanized pipe held up a two foot strip of chicken wire. The new wall ran some yards past the house, to the west, and a little way past the main barn to the east, and then reverted to the old dry stone boundary wall again. The iron gate was the same age as the renovations.

And the house had been expanded by simply adding rooms, one behind the other, on the side away from the road, and running a hall along the west side, each room with a door on the hall, and a window on the barnyard. The stones came from other buildings which M. Vert owned or had acquired in land swaps—that was where the door and window stones from the ruin by my garden had gone. During those years he too had been a mayor for a while, of his own commune of

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Monteferre, and had made enemies for life by using the information and powers of his office to threaten land seizures for the back taxes and debts, and effecting subsequent transfers of land in his own favor. He had land for miles around. Mme. Vert, a sunny, pretty, kind woman with a clear laugh that told of a strong, good, but reserved heart, had brought to the marriage land in the valley, and they worked, down there, a vineyard of several acres, a plum orchard, wheat fields. Their house, when the moved stones had been rearranged by the valley mason who usually built barns, was covered with the old tiles taken from roofs in the neighborhood—including the tiles from my ruin. And the whole building had been *crépi*, as a final touch, with two coats of mortar.

Over the years as the roof had been repaired the old dark tiles had been replaced along the eaves with new, bright, *tuiles mécaniques*, which would take over more of the roof each time it was overhauled and the tiles cracked by the frost were pried out and thrown down. The mortar had shaded to a mottled gray, almost like the stones. The grape vine had grown up the wires along the southeast side near the front door, and the wall around it was air-brushed a pale green by the Bordeaux mixture that was sprayed on the leaves in the summer. In a few decades the house had an age of its own.

So that the fly curtain of yellow plastic streamers at the door, and the frosted glass visor above it, looked new as party hats. And M. Vert's mother, in her eighties, wearing her perennial black dress with its print of a snowstorm of minute flowers, her gray apron and her wide straw hat, looked completely at home as she wandered back and forth along the earth-stained cement slab beside the house, carrying flower pots or old cans full of geraniums, flowering cactus, dahlias, or in the autumn, chrysanthemums. She set them on top of the wall inside the chicken wire, or on the bench by the door to get some sun if she had brought them out of the house. The additional rooms had been built right over the ancient garden enclosure and she had never got used to that. To her it seemed as though the change had taken place a few months ago. M. Vert had run some sheep fence from the end of the house out to the wall

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by the road, closing off a triangle around the lid of the cesspool, and he had dumped loads of manure in there from time to time, and his daughter Jacinthe managed to grow a few hollyhocks in there, but not much else. The earth inside the triangle still harked back to the stony red subsoil dug out at the time of building, and that was why it was "ungrateful," M. Vert said. But his mother simply shrugged and smiled and said that nothing had ever wanted to grow just there, and nothing ever would. There was another old garden enclosure beside the open-fronted cart shed opposite the entrance door of the house. It was full of rich black soil built up with manure out of the barn next to it, and in there M. Vert's wife grew most of their vegetables: giant lettuces and cabbages, tomatoes, onions, carrots, leeks, and sorrel.

The long barn itself had been altered little by little. The facade facing west, across the barnyard from the house, still showed some of the original stonework. The cows filed to their stalls through the massive stone doorway under an oak beam whose girth approached their own. M. Vert had pulled all the tiles off part of the barn and replaced them with the gray hexagonal shingles of some patent composition that had been pushed, for a few years, by the vendors of building materials, and then had been all but abandoned in favor of corrugated roofing, which covered the high lean-to that M. Vert had tacked onto the end of the barn, and the industrial shed that he had built farther back to house machinery: tractor, hayrake, manure spreader, old truck, buzz saw. He had ripped out part of the back of the barn and built a wing as large as the whole of the old barn, for his sheep, and that too was roofed with corrugated metal and never seemed finished, perhaps because he himself dreamed constantly of adding to it, but still in stone, using the stones from the ancient barn beyond the dew pond, which was another of the structures that he described as "nothing but stones."

The peasants who defended the traditional methods of sheep raising shook their heads at the metal roofs. No insulation. Too hot in the summer. And certainly the heat added to the smell, in the barns where the sheep were fattened on

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the new bag feed with its list of polysyllabic additives in fine print on the tag in the seam of the sack. The old barns smelled of ammonia and straw as one came into the cool darkness. The new ones shimmered with an acrid stench of decomposition. M. Vert did not plan to follow the full "progressive" practice and keep his sheep in a closed barn all their lives. But he began to add sacks of the modern feed to the mangers in his barn, and the odor began to seep into the barnyard. "But not much," he said, jerking his head toward the piles of sacks. "Only to finish them. For fattening." And he kept a few sheep apart and fed them on nothing but what was grown on the place. They were for the family freezer. In the daytime they all went out to pasture together.

From the hayloft window at the back of the house in which M. Vert's mother had grown up I watched them come in to the pasture below. In the first hours of the morning in the summer they scattered over the rocky acres, moving like clouds among the clumps of sloes, through the shadows of brambles, clattering on the loose stones, the lambs calling. The few bells clonking and tonkling. I could hear the small teeth snapping the coarse grass close to the ground, and grinding it. The voices of cuckoos echoed from the far trees, and by nine the shrilling of the cicadas was rising like a tide, and a faint smell of mice wafted under the house roof. As the sun climbed, the sheep moved closer together and gathered in the shade of the walnut trees: under a big one standing alone out in the pasture, and under the smaller ones along the wall just below me. In the late morning they pressed tightly against each other, their heads down, the ones by the wall butting the stones. The mass of gray backs washed slowly from side to side as in a tide pool, the sheep pushing to try to get deeper into the shade, and from time to time one of them who had been shoved out at the side until the whole wooly back was in the sun would pull out from the crowd and gallop around the rim of sheep butts to dive in somewhere else, tail twitching, sometimes repeating the process two or three times before finding a spot in which to burrow for a while. Some of the lambs managed to squeeze among the legs and find their mothers' teats. They

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disappeared as though they had drowned. By noon the swarmed sheep were almost still, and the whole *causse* grew hushed at midday except for the cicadas.

One morning just after the summer solstice the sheep appeared without their wool, looking pallid and famished. They were scored with the marks of the electric clippers, from behind their ears to half-way down their legs, as though they had been gnawed by rats. They clattered faster than usual on the bleached stones, constantly startled, and they huddled earlier in the shade, twitching their short tails incessantly against the flies.

Until only a few years before, the sheep had been shorn by hand. Those who had raised sheep all their lives, and the professional shearers who went from farm to farm in the season, appeared to move their shears over the recumbent sheep almost as fast as the clippers went, and the sheep, when they were finished, looked as though they had been made by a wood carver who had left them covered with the marks of the adze.

That was the way Michel and his brother the roofer sheared their flock, outside the barn behind their house, the next Sunday. One by one as the shorn bodies were released they were turned out onto the green. We stood by the oven, late in the afternoon, and they surveyed their work and told me how many bags of wool they had shorn, and rehearsed the virtues of wool.

"It's the only thing," Robert the roofer said. "*Causse* wool."

"Nothing like it," Michel said. "For the health. But it has to be raw wool."

"Winter," Robert said, "it's the only thing. It keeps the feet warm."

"Best thing to sleep on," Robert said. "Wool mattress."

"We don't sleep on anything else," Michel said.

"Sweaters," Robert said.

"You put it against your back," Michel said, pushing his hand up inside his red sleeveless jersey, "like that. Pure wool. For rheumatism. For the kidneys. It draws it out. My mother puts it here. My father put it there."

"It warms you," Robert said.

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"It absorbs," Michel said.

"It absorbs everything," Robert confirmed, with a gesture of his hand like a magician's about to draw a handkerchief out of the air. "Primordial."

"Even wet," Michel said. "It's good in the rain. Impermeable. The old shepherds' cloaks."

They both nodded.

"To the ground," Michel said. "My grandfather wore one. That was all they needed. You could live in it."

"You wrapped it," Robert showed me with a gesture, "like that, to carry a lamb."

"When it rained," Michel said, "you just pulled the cape over your head. And you stayed dry."

"But it just got heavier," Robert said. "Thousand gods, it got heavy. With the water soaking into it." He laughed. "How they ever walked home under it—" he shrugged.

"Me, I don't mind the rain," Michel said. "Only a little, in the winter. I use a sack, that's all, over my head. And my umbrella." His huge ripped umbrella.

And he was the last, no doubt, of the shepherds on that part of the *causse* who sat, in bad weather, in any of the remaining shelters built into the boundary walls of the pastures, echoes of the stone ovens and the bee-hive houses of the Gauls, so deftly fitted into the slopes of the ground and the meanders of the walls that some of them were all but invisible unless you stood directly in front of them. Some of them were cramped and narrow, but most of them were a pace or so across, wide enough for two shepherds to crawl into at once, if need be, and sit facing each other on the stone bench that was part of the wall, and they were high enough inside so that the shepherds could sit back out of the wind under the flat stones of the ceiling and look out over a broad landscape of *causse* with lines of woods, dips of valleys, clouds. One shelter not far from the green had been set on a steep slope that was part of a long valley. A standing cave. It was crouched between two huge rocks, in oak woods that ended just in front of it, so that the shelter was hidden from behind and above, and looked out on a broad hollow that wound away out of sight like a river.

Each of the shelters was sited to watch over a wide expanse

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of grazing land. Each of their arched doorways framed a place that was like nowhere else. Sockets. Michel would never have admitted to sitting in one. Never. Not as a child, when they were regarded with awe. Children did not play in them. The huts were the abodes of figures of the past, and were spoken of as though they were haunted, though it was never said, and there were no stories. In the present age there was a certain shame attached to the notion of actually entering one and sitting there, taking shelter in so rude and small a place, the kind of protection that humans had been making for themselves in that region, out of the stones lying there, for perhaps thousands of years. Nobody wanted to be thought of as backward. Almost no one in the region had sat in the huts for a long time. Roots came through the roofs. Trees grew through them. Every year the reclamation project devoured a few more, along with the walls into which they had been built. But Michel sat in them, unseen, and looked out on pastures that were his own and on others that were not. He emerged from them cautiously, and looked up at the open air overhead, while his sheep flowed around him.

I waited for M. Vert to ask me whether the neighbor had shorn his sheep yet, and then to tell me that they had to do it by hand because they were too tight-fisted or too poor to pay the shearers, and because they had no electricity.

"Imagine," he said. "They didn't *want* electricity when it came."

I said that I sympathized, but he never heard it.

"The line could have gone down to the green for nothing, when it came past here," he said. "But they wouldn't have it. The mayor tried to make them have it, but they wouldn't." He touched his forehead.

The top of his head was pressed into the flank of one of his cows, one of the red-brown Salers, and his hands went on milking into a pail between his legs. He still kept Salers for the milk for his family and for the calves, but he had introduced several of the black and white Friesians. Their milk was thinner and poorer but there was more of it. I came up the lane every evening with the scalded-out bottle, for milk, and

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was barked at, inside the gate, by Montagne, who then greeted me. I looked for the owl that came and went from the top of the barn, and listened for the sound of M. Vert talking to his cows, "*La! La! Eh ben!*" Mme. Vert would come out of the kitchen and say, "He's milking," and we would go together into the barn and begin the round of the day's gossip, while the cow swayed, stamped, swatted around her with her tail, and was told to stand still. M. Vert called her a slut, buried his head into her side, which had made the top of his beret shine like patent leather, and he screwed his face around to look up as he talked.

He straightened up and put the funnel on top of the bottle and the piece of screen in the funnel for the cow's hairs, and poured the bottle full. Suddenly it was warm in my hand. If he was finished milking we went into the kitchen, some evenings, and stood for a few minutes reviewing the local news, with M. Vert's mother working at the big range set in the embrasure where the fireplace had been. A band of red and white checked material a few inches wide hung from under the brown painted board of the mantlepiece. Pieces of antique polished copper, brass candlesticks, a coffee mill, on the mantel itself. The walls had been painted yellow. The post office calendar with a picture of the yacht harbor in St. Tropez hung over the long formica-covered table. The TV stood on top of the refrigerator, and it was on. M. and Mme. Vert's hare-lipped younger daughter was watching it from a chair at the table.

I paid for the milk once a month if they would allow me to. Usually they refused, saying that they used water from the big house for the watering trough in the pasture, or telling me that it didn't count because I had been away for a few nights. I helped with watering the fodder beets when the Verts transplanted them into the field, and with picking peas and beans when they came on too fast, and those were cited as payment for the milk and for the vegetables from their garden which Mme. Vert pressed on me most evenings, even when I had brought them vegetables from my own. A lettuce (when I had more than I could eat). New potatoes. "We'll only give them to the pigs," she said. Sometimes she said, "Wait," and disap-

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peared for a moment and came back with a few eggs wrapped in newspaper. "We have too many," she explained.

If I helped with anything invested with ceremonial importance, such as haying—or even if I didn't, and they were engaged in it—I would be invited to the great banquet that always followed it, at tables of planks and trestles set up in the courtyard if the weather was fine, or in the cart shed across from the kitchen if it looked like rain. I entered a bubbling of humanity, startling after the wordless *causse*. They were sitting at the long benches, the men in their hats, laughing and interrupting. Workmen and neighbors and members of the family who had helped with the job or were owed some favor or were simply invited because they were always invited. Noodles in the soup, to begin with, instead of bread, as the sign of a special occasion. The soup plates, once the soup was emptied, rinsed out with half a glass of the thin dark wine from the vineyard in the valley, which was then drunk from the plates. The local custom called *chavrol*. Then the glasses filled, to accompany the omelette and the farm paté. Rabbit and chicken and lamb. Potatoes and peas and salad. Goat cheese from the village. Fresh cows' milk cheese—a rarity—from the farm. Camembert from the grocer's truck that stopped once a week at the gate. *Baba au rhum*, or *clafouti*, and coffee, and fruit if it was in season. Cherries and strawberries at haying time. And then the clear bottle of plum *eau-de-vie*, passed around the table with the coffee, to pour into it, or into the cup when it was empty.

"Not for me," M. Vert said. "It's bad in the sun."

A huge load of hay towered above the flat trailer hitched to the tractor at the end of the courtyard, and he planned to unload it into the barn that afternoon when the guests had all filed out picking their teeth, to the cars parked by the gate.

Somebody was sure to tell me again that it used to be like this all the time when they worked together in the fields, and ate at the farm where they had been working.

"Now we don't see each other," they said. "There's never time."

And I was asked politely whether I still liked living down

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on the green in the big house, and whether it wasn't too quiet for me or too lonely, and how I was getting along with the neighbors.

Coming back in the afternoon, the green was still, surrounded by the glare and the unending high note of the cicadas. Michel's door was closed, with the plastic fly curtain pulled back. There was nobody home. The rotting five-bar chestnut gate at the entrance to the courtyard of the house with the tower had been propped in place with sticks. A narrow path led in through the tall cow parsley and vetch, but it was not possible to see from the gate whether or not the house was even inhabited. The walnut tree and the tower and heavy walls behind its shade were enfolded in a silence of their own. M. Vert said that the house had been there during the Wars of Religion. Some of the local inhabitants said so too, though they were perhaps as likely to exaggerate as he was. There was the usual legend which went with houses of comparable antiquity on the *causse*, of an underground passage that led out from the cellar, under the fields, and emerged in one of the steep ravines that ran down to the valley. M. Vert said he knew where it came out but that the place was hidden now. It was a way of describing a root.

The walls of the house held the cold of the night all through the day.

"It's cool there in the summer, isn't it?" M. Vert asked, with a certain proprietorial vanity. When the *causse* shimmered with heat and the sheep pressed hard into the shade, the house had a chill like deep water. A breeze from under the cellar door flowed up the stairs and out onto the stone porch, and on up and out of the upper windows. When the sheep began to move out again across the pasture I would slip out at the gate, carrying a can of water down the lane to the garden, or if it had rained I would go over the wall at the foot of the old acacia, and along the edge of the lower field, the long way around, to come to the garden from the other side of the Roman road.

The brambles retreated and the cultivated rows advanced across the walled triangle of the garden. The narrow *causse*

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hoe, the *bécou*, made for me by a blacksmith friend from an old carriage spring, sang in the stones. Before long, even that first season, I had more to take home in the evenings than I could eat. I invented new salads: young white squash sliced with green walnuts and mushrooms, for one. I tossed chopped young cabbage and garlic and tarragon together in grape seed oil. Tomatoes ripened on the window sills. When I went out to get them after dark they were warm.

Friends came to visit, but almost no strangers found their way to the green. I was amazed one morning by a knock at the door and the delivery of a telegram, by a young woman who had parked on the green. From then on such messages reached me from time to time, or in bad weather were left for me at M. Vert's. The Jehovah's Witnesses from a town an hour's drive away showed up one morning to inquire about the state of my soul. They had asked, at Michel's house, whether the house with the tower was inhabited, and Michel's mother had confessed that it was. They questioned me about how long I had lived there, and for a moment I could not remember.

The other house across the green, due north, the one full of furniture, with the date 1819 carved over its door and the last trees dying around it, continued to shed its tiles suddenly in the still nights. Michel let his sheep in around the house and I saw him from time to time peer in through the loose shutter of the west window. I looked in myself, every so often, to see what I could of the bed with its crocheted spread, the table with its cloth, everything in there rotting as the rain got in. It seemed as unlikely as ever that the house would be repaired, but one day during a week of cold rain in the summer a thin young man and thin young woman turned up on the green in a rusted 2CV. They drove in at the empty gate, stopped by the front door and got out in their raincoats, stepping on the cracking border of broken tiles, and the young man fished out a key as long as a table knife, struggled with the rusted lock while the rain poured down off the eave, and got the key to turn at last. Then he tried to push the door open. But it was stuck, and they both put their shoulders to it and heaved. It let go all at once, a foot or so, and a rotten

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board from above it, and a bushel of plaster and rubble cascaded onto the floor in front of them. Very carefully they slipped through the opening and into the house.

They emerged a few minutes later carrying half a dozen dinner plates which they set out in the rain, and then in spite of the weather they started pitching their tent between the house and the wall along the green. The rain stopped when they had finished. The young man dragged pieces of dead trees up near the tent and they managed to start a fire. The next day I took some pieces of wood across to them and Michel turned up at the wall and joined us. The young couple was from a city on the Mediterranean. They were both students. They spoke very quietly—so quietly that they were barely audible. He would have liked to study history, he said, but was training in pharmacology "to make a living." She was studying to be a schoolteacher. He was a son of one of the owners of the house, and he was trying to persuade the rest of the family to let him have it so that he could fix it up. He had loved it all his life, he said, and had always dreamed of having it to come to, and living in it on the empty *causse*. I asked her how she liked it and she said she liked it very much. She thought it was beautiful. She loved the country and did not mind that it did not have all the comforts. She loved the silence, she said, and the rain.

For days they dragged things out onto the grass to dry in the sun, once the rain had really stopped. Half decayed quilts, drunken chairs, a three-legged spinning wheel. A cradle, miraculously undamaged. Kerosene lamps. Bowls, and iron cooking pots. In the evenings they made fires, using pieces of disintegrating floor board, and we talked about what they hoped to do to the house—restore it as it had been—and where they hoped to have trees and a garden. Ten days later they put all the things back into the house in a pile, and brought a sheet of plastic and covered them, and hauled the door shut and locked it carefully and drove off up the lane to the north under the big lime trees.

A year later, in high summer, they were back, looking as much as ever like a pair of fledglings, and they were followed,

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a day later, by another 2CV *fourgonette* crammed with two more couples who turned out to be architecture students, disciples of a man of whom they spoke with awe, a professor of architecture, and a historian of architecture, whose passion was restoring ancient domestic and agricultural buildings. The four young architecture students and several of their friends had already restored two old farms farther south, and we all spent several evenings planning the restoration of the house full of furniture, and of the ruin beside my garden as well, which they agreed must have been built by the same mason at about the same time. They spoke of both houses as particularly pure, beautiful, examples of the *causse* shepherds' houses of the period just after the Revolution. "They've got *dog*," one of the students kept saying. And the students talked enthusiastically of bringing their professor, and trying to get the whole of the green protected by the government.

They too drove off up the lane some days later, and the first young couple followed. And then nothing, until the word came back that the family was still a problem and that at least one of the heirs was refusing to cooperate, but that the young man was still trying to persuade them all. The next year the young couple did not come back at all.

The autumn comes late there. In September a haze veiled the sky above the *causse* and the evenings and mornings were edged with mist along the walls. The house grew cold, as it had been in the spring. The warmth of the day never entered, and I stayed closer to the fireplaces and to the wood stove up in the room with the hayloft window over the pasture. In the afternoons, when Michel came past the garden with his sheep and stopped to ask, each time, "Well, you still working?" the sun would be filling the lane with long rays but the day would be growing chill, and we would discuss the likelihood of frost that night. Some of the firewood was already stacked for winter.

The corn grew well in that garden, despite the shallowness of the soil, and when the first frost seemed to be almost upon us I had several short rows with ears just forming, from the last

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planting. I picked them all and took them home. Husked, they were the size of little fingers, and I steamed them and had an autumn feast. I could not have given them away, for none of my neighbors would have touched them.

Dry windstorms at the end of summer. Then days at a time of cold rain. The first yellowing leaves. Afterwards the days seemed to return to summer, but the green of the plums had begun to take on a blue shadow. I sickled the grass under the trees, and took an old wine barrel and rinsed it out and stood it under the big walnut tree with a few inches of water in the bottom. Several times a day I rocked the barrel, sloshing the water up the sides to swell the wood and close the cracks.

The tomatoes had been harvested and still lined the south windowsills on which the shutters were closed at night. The garden was full of leeks and cabbages, brussels sprouts, broccoli, endives, sorrel, a spreading bush of loveage in one corner. The last hollyhocks were blooming on the tops of their dry stalks against the curved back of the oven, and there was even an autumn damask rose blooming, grown from a cutting taken from the garden of a ruin miles away on the *causse*.

But as the autumn came in there was less to do in the garden and I spent more of the afternoons wandering on the *causse*. If the day was clear the air was warm by then, and the sky was bright. There was bronze in the earth and leaves and lichens on the stones, in the rust of the eglantines' foliage, around their clusters of scarlet hips, and everything looked like its own reflection in clear water.

The lanes led out through the woods, past ruined towers and farms which I knew room by room, window by window. They disappeared in thickets and re-emerged winding along hillsides among the golds and black of the oaks, down through overgrown farmyards into small valleys that opened out like estuaries. They arrived in fields just plowed, with walnut trees standing in them alone, the leaves already looking like leather. The *causse* smelled of the changed season, of black humus among the roots of moss. I found my way into caves in the woods that shelved down under the table land into the drip-

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ping maze of galleries and streams, and caverns with walls still showing the animals of the Great Hunt. Three steps into the earth and the silence seemed absolute.

Most days I went on foot, but I had also acquired a bicycle, just as Michel had. Only his was a stripped-down racing model on which he travelled occasionally to see his brother or to visit someone miles away. He bent over the handlebars, pumping with his massive legs, muttering to himself phrases with which the sports announcer, in the summer, had described the Tour de France. Mine was of a design called, frankly, a Wanderer. The short, muscular bicycle salesman who had sold it to me, an old friend, had clearly been disappointed that I had not chosen something more like Michel's. Something, he said, with which I could hope to enter the *rallys*, the bicycle races that wound through the villages decorated with strings of flags, in the *fêtes* at the end of summer.

Mine was, unfortunately, purple—there were no other Wanderers—but it was otherwise perfect, and I travelled on it farther and farther away. I came to know more of my neighbors as the summer receded.

Then one morning, after a night of rain, the blue plums had begun to fall. Every day then, as long as they went on falling, they were picked up from the grass. It was a regular round, with a couple of buckets, that began with the trees just beyond the former duck pond outside the door, in the courtyard, and continued tree by tree around the walls and over them into the next field, to the old trees around its edges, between the trunks of the walnuts.

"Are you picking up the plums?" M. Vert asked.

I assured him that I was. We discussed once again the matter of barrels, the excellence of the vaulted cellar and his offer to use his own *patent*, his own permit, to make *eau-de-vie*, later in the autumn, from the plums I gathered, as well as from his own. The *patent* was his by right as an agricultural *exploitant* who had been able to claim that said situation had existed unchanged since before a certain date, and that his or her parents, furthermore, had been on the land for a certain period before that. It was a serious offense to make *eau-de-vie* in any

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of the clandestine ways that might have suggested themselves to a people so independent and so fond of providing for themselves. The government's zeal to control the manufacture and above all the sale of *eau-de-vie* had its roots in the excise laws and the revenue they produced. It is in the nature of government to need absolutely every bit of money it can raise. The government's travelling inspectors, the revenuers, were the *gabelous*. They were detested and feared, and were the heroes of jokes. There were peasants in the region who still boasted of a time, preserved in verbal as well as written history, when the King had utterly failed to collect taxes in those parts for decades on end, and the royal collector who came to try was thrown into the river. It was spoken of as a Golden Age.

The laws suppressing home manufacture of alcohol had been administered very strictly in latter times as a result of a government campaign against alcoholism. Every year the peasants who still made *eau-de-vie* lived in fear of new legislation that would prevent it entirely. Finally they seemed fairly secure, for the time being: those who already had a permit to make *eau-de-vie* from their own plums would continue to be able to make so many liters a year, for their own lifetimes. But there would be no successors, and no new permits would be granted.

It was a campaign, in the view of the peasants, fomented by the *licoristes*, the commerical manufacturers of alcoholic drinks, in order to prevent competition from the homemade *eau-de-vie*, which was pure fruit alcohol, and vastly superior to the doctored and colored syrupy stuff that they sold in the stores with phony antique labels and a lot of hoo-ha about their traditional vats and ageing, when everyone knew the guys who worked there and how much burned beet sugar they used. The *licoristes*, for their part, affected a disdain for the *eau-de-vie* from the villages, which "tastes of the burner," they said. But they evidently felt threatened by it, and they bought it from the peasants, when they could, to mix in and increase their own production. According to the peasants, the *licoristes* just wanted them to be unable to make *eau-de-vie* so that they would have to buy the stuff the *licoristes* sold in the stores.

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"Never," Robert said.

"Never," M. Vert said.

They bought, each, one bottle of dark rum (Negrita) a year, for the coffee, on special occasions, because that was what you did.

"It's not that we drink the *eau-de-vie* ourselves," M. Vert said. "It's useful. One uses it. And one sells it."

The *patent* gave each qualified agricultural *exploitant* living on his or her own land the right to make one thousand degrees of *eau-de-vie* a year, which, at the alcoholic strength that the distillers taught—about 108 proof—worked out to roughly nineteen liters each. Or that was the accepted mathematical explanation of the nineteen liters limit that peasants and *gabelous* agreed on.

The windfall blue plums were the principal source—the plum was a kind of quetsch, called locally the St. Antoni, or pig plum (St. Anthony's animal is a pig) because they used the plums for fattening pigs. Windfall greengages were used, by anyone who had them. And more rarely, *mirabelles*: small, gold, transparent. But those were the only kinds of plums that were used for *eau-de-vie*. The big round black one that was sold half ripe, to be shipped to Belgium as a dessert plum, was no good for it, and the Agen, which was dried to make prunes, was tolerable but not valued for alcohol.

The plums had to be picked up from the ground. They had to be ripe enough to fall by themselves. The filled buckets were emptied into barrels and left to ferment. There was a time in the autumn when almost every inhabited house in the country whose owner had a few plum trees—and both the blues and the greengages grew wild throughout the region—had a barrel or two bubbling away in the cellar, plop-plopping like cooking corn meal.

A full barrel of plums, depending on how good the summer had been, how much sugar the plums had made, and how much juice, would produce close to twenty liters of *eau-de-vie*. The plums poured from the buckets into the barrels, to begin with, making a soft thunder on the wet wood, and then an excited staccato splashing, too fast for the notes to be distinct,

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as the barrel filled. All the later buckets, day after day, were poured through a cloud of gnats that closed over the barrels as the plums came to rest.

But first they had to be gathered. Gathering is older than agriculture and the gatherer knows it. Gathering is on happier and calmer terms with the unforeseen than are the later efforts of our kind to control the living world so that there can be more of us in every measured part of it. Gathering fallen fruit is a stage beyond picking it from its branches. When you pick you choose the fruit. With fallen fruit the tree and the fruit have made the decision before you. You have to find where the fruit has gone on its own. In the autumn nights when there was no wind I could hear the plums falling in the dark.

I went out in the morning and they were lying in the wet grass among the stumps of sloes and brambles, and in the crevices between rocks. They were the color of the sky a long time before sunrise just after the stars go out. The cold night had covered them with clear dew. It is better to leave them until they are dry, to let the sun get to them after they have fallen. Water is a great enemy of your *eau-de-vie*. So some picked them up in the afternoons, some in the evenings. But there were those who didn't care, or had no other time, and picked them up in the mornings, still hard, with the chill dew on them. Some picked them up a bucket or two at a time. Some rushed to fill a couple of barrels all at once, and then collected more later on, as there were chances and barrels. Sometimes a whole family picked them up together, late in the afternoon, backs bent and turning in the mottled shade. It was not a furtive labor but it was private and followed a different pattern in each household, just as each family's fields and trees were laid out differently.

It is a ruminative hunt, likely to be silent even if several are engaged upon it. The mind of each gatherer turns separately, out of focus. More than one sense is called upon. Where a tree leans over a fallen wall the plums are piled among the stones like eggs. The top ones show, but usually there are others below that found their way there first, and you grope along the damp faces of the rock, feeling for them, and hook them out

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one by one with a finger. In the shade under the brambles the plums often cannot be seen at all, and you reach in slowly, so as not to stab a finger with a thorn, or thrust your hand among unseen nettles, and you pat your way through the base of the grass until you touch the cool, smooth skin of a plum, and you roll it out if it can't be picked up. The vipers are still awake at that season, and you remember it, if the sun is hot, but they are rare, even among the stones. In the rain the plums feel like part of the rain come to rest. You stand up and the horizon is a surprise each time, and the size and color of the world come back from far away. The buckets are stained with the red of the plums that are already fermenting. You wipe your fingers on the grass that smells of moss. The sheep eat the plums you miss or the soft ones you leave. From the edges of the pastures you hear the small teeth cracking the seeds.

Before the month is out, after the moon has turned old, the mushrooms begin, and it is the same hunt, but in different shadows, under different trees, the mushrooms appearing like muted lights in the wet grass or the moss or among leaves, their skin powdery to the touch, softer than plums, making it seem as though the gathering of the windfall fruit had been the introduction to the true secret hunt, the search for mushrooms. And meanwhile the plums were working in their barrels in the cellar, domestic and hidden.

After the mushrooms come in—psalliotis, marasmius, girolles and chanterelles, cèpes and morelles, bluets, oyster mushrooms, trumpets of death—the walnuts begin to fall, cracking on the walls in the wind. The gathering retraced the steps of the plum hunt, weeks earlier. A day might begin with gathering mushrooms and go on to picking up walnuts, which were dropped with a clatter into wooden baskets, and then poured, rattling lightly, into burlap sacks, to be spread out in lofts to dry. There was an annual war over them with the rats, who found their own, under the trees, and carried them off deep into the walls where they could be heard gnawing at all hours—a sound that was the successor to the cicadas, as the days grew short. Later in the autumn the dried walnuts were shovelled back into the sacks to be sold. Some farms first

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dipped them in *eau-de-javel* to remove the last of the husks and bleach the shell, but others frowned on the practice.

By then the weather was cold and rainy. The seething and bubbling of the plums had quieted in the barrels, and the rumor began to circulate that the *bruleur de cru*, the distiller, was about to arrive in the village to make everyone's *eau-de-vie*. Some of the old farms had their own stills: big copper vats with double bottoms and walls, copper swans' necks reaching out from their lids to enter the essential part, the piece that was registered with its own number in an official tome, the part mentioned with a certain awe, the holy of holies of the still, the *serpentine*—a coil of copper tubing suspended in a copper box. On each of the old stills hidden away in barns the *serpentine* had been locked shut and sealed with a wire and a lead wafer marked with a number, and the date when it was sealed.

"Oh, you don't dare touch that," the owner said. "If the *gabelous* find that broken, it's serious." Of course, if you had a still and a *patent* you could, theoretically, use the big engine once a year to make your own nineteen liters. But that would involve filling in forms in an office in town, an application in many phases, in order to have an official come and remove the seal on a certain day, and the official would almost certainly be one of the *gabelous* who would go sniffing around the place, poking into corners, checking on how many liters of plums you had gathered, asking how much you had made last year and whether any was left and where was it, and making sure you did not make more than your limit, from your own plums off your own trees. Whereas if you did it when the *bruleur* came to the village, owner after owner explained—and did not finish the sentence but simply dropped the corners of his mouth, nodded, and raised a finger. So the private stills were used less and less, and some were being sold off to antique dealers, piece by copper piece, and usually without the *serpentine*. M. Vert himself did not have one, but the reason for that was never divulged in so many words. The lack of it appeared to be a part of the relative rawness of his farm, which had been subjected to so many changes in his own time. The subject of the still faded into the general impression

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which M. Vert gave, much of the time, of preferring to forget the past.

When the date of the *bruleur*'s arrival was definitely known it was relayed in a hushed voice, though his work was officially sanctioned and his itinerary registered. It was as though a spotlight came with him. No one could be sure whether or not the *gabelous* would be by in the course of the day or two when he would be distilling in the neighborhood, and everyone felt a flutter of anxiety at the moment of actually signing the application for distilling. The preparations for the deed were carried out as though they were part of a secret mission. The froth and the layer of skins and seeds floating on top of the liquid in the barrels was scooped off and tossed aside in some spot where the quantity would not be apparent. Then the fermented juice was dipped out with a bucket into *comportes* used a few months earlier for the grape harvest: heavy wooden casks, open at the top, which was wider than the base, and with wooden cleats like small stiff arms on the sides, under which poles could be slipped, for carrying them. They were transported, in one vehicle or another, to some spot near the village *place* where the *bruleur* was already at work.

It was usually raining, at distilling time, and he would have set up his great engine under a big lime or walnut tree and opened an enormous cafe umbrella over it, orange sections alternating with white advertisements for aperitifs, to protect the operation and the equipment and himself. The copper still on its chassis and wagon wheels, resembled a small, burnished, antique locomotive or a particularly magnificent popcorn stand, and the *bruleur* himself looked as though he might be peddling things to eat at a fair: a short, pink-faced, sunny officiant, whom everyone knew, the rest of the year, as the owner of a small pig farm and village store specializing in homemade sausages, some miles away in the *segala*.

Along with the juice, and the money to pay him for his work, each *patent* holder had brought some oak logs for firewood. Each in turn went through the paper work, the signing under the umbrella, so much a liter for taxes and distilling, and

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brought out the first *comporte* from around the corner, and a round, wicker-covered glass jug, a *bonbonne*, with a capacity of twenty or thirty liters. Then the bearers stood by as casually as possible, in rubber boots, their black umbrellas swaying under the drip of the orange and white dome in the middle, while the distilling took its slow course. The smoke from the fire-box under the vat rose around the umbrella, and floated out through the rain; and wisps of steam slithered upward from the alembic. The *place* shimmered with the smells of fermented plums, warm alcohol, wet clothes, rubber boots, the smoke of burning *causse* oak and of black tobacco, the rain and the rotting leaves. The vapor of the heated juice climbed into the swan's neck and then passed into the coil of tubing in the *serpentine* which was kept cool by running water through the outer casing. The warmed water trickled away down the cobbled gutter at the edge of the *place*. The first condensed drops of clear alcohol began to drip from the bottom of the *serpentine*, and the *bruleur* filled a glass with the alcohol and dropped his floats into it to determine the proof, and made adjustments accordingly, and re-arranged the fire, and poured water on the thick layer of wet straw between the casings at the bottom of the still, that was there to keep the juice from overheating. The flow of alcohol continued and he tasted the result and passed the glass around to the owner and the bystanders, each of whom sipped, and made a face as though the taste were an abomination to them, and then smiled and nodded. The rest of the glass was tossed onto the ground to show that nobody cared.

All around the *place*, on stone porches, in doorways, in windows, at the ends of lanes, neighbors stood and watched for a while, then disappeared, returned to watch some more, came over to gossip. The oldest man in the village, gaunt and white, sat on a stone bench at a corner of a porch and told everyone within earshot all the stories about *eau-de-vie* that he could remember.

"Once when we were young," he said, "we bet a young apprentice that he couldn't drink a whole liter. He was a young

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fellow, not from around here. From somewhere else. So he took the bet. He took it. And he drank it. The whole bottle. And he died."

There was an appropriate silence. "We thought he was just sleeping it off, there in the barn in the hay. But when we tried to wake him—not possible."

Another silence.

"Ah yes," said one of the neighbors.

"Ah yes," said another.

"He was just going to be married," the old man went on. "We had had a little of it too, you know, but we slept it off. It's too strong," he said, smacking his lips. "We didn't tell anybody. That was one time."

The *bruleur* put nineteen liters into the first *bonbonne* which was then set beside a wall in full view. Then if there was no sign or word of the *gabelous* another *bonbonne* was brought out, and another *comporte*, and so, with luck, it went, until all the *comportes* were emptied and it was the turn of the next name on the list. The *bruleur* was paid for the extra amount, and the *bonbonnes* and empty *comportes* were loaded up. The permits covered not only the manufacture but the transportation on the roads of the legal amount of alcohol, between x hour and x hour of x day, and the first *bonbonne* was loaded last and placed more conspicuously than anything else in the vehicle, which made its way home with as little waste of time as possible.

Even then the suspense was by no means over. Every villager could tell of one big farm that made a thousand liters a year—either with the *bruleur*'s permit or its own—and sold it in the valley, through the liquor dealers, wine dealers, restaurant owners, or ordinary word of mouth. The *licoristes* bought it to mix in their vats with whatever else they had there, and colored it and resold it under quaint names, in sanded "antique" bottles. The big farms never had their barns searched, for reasons one could only guess at, but as for everyone else, the *gabelous* were capable of turning up at any time—it was said that they preferred the week or two before Christmas.

One village across the valley buzzed all winter about a visit

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from the *gabelous*, with orders to search, two nights before the end of the year. In that village they made what, for the region, was a great deal of wine, and rather than waste the mash they made *marc* out of that, as well as the *eau-de-vie* they made from their plums. But their permits were the same as everyone else's, and it stood to reason that they all had much more than the legal amount of alcohol tucked away in their farm buildings, for sale as the market smiled on them. They had begun to think that the *gabelous* were a thing of the past when suddenly the official van turned up at a farm at the bottom of the village that foggy evening when everyone was still recovering from Christmas. And it was remarkable, the neighbors said, how many farms in the village immediately felt the urgent need to move loads of manure up the mountain in the middle of the night.

In the winter the *causse* became at once more secret and more open. You could see farther than you had come to think was possible, through the leafless trees, across the snowy slopes full of the gray outcroppings of stones and the drawn shadows. It was bitter cold in the big house of stones and the drawn shadows. It was bitter cold in the big house then. The heart of the tower was icy, and the air in the rooms was colder than the day outside.

There was food all winter in the garden. Leeks, cabbages, brussels sprouts, endives, turnips. The mud in January, in the thaws; the hard white ice in all the hollows again, in February, which was the coldest month. The sheep moved over the pasture, darker than the snow, gray like the stones. They found stubble to eat. Their breath was whiter than they were. In the evenings they were brought in early and the barns were warmed by their rotting droppings trampled into the straw.

In March the snow of the plum blossoms, the sky rising like a curtain above them. Clouds appearing everywhere, even in places where one had forgotten that there were plum trees. The plum grows wild there, and for a moment it fills the world with its own whiteness, after the snow.

By the second year the brambles were gone from the garden. They had been piled in the gaps in the walls and filled them,

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to the delight of the mice. Down the middle of the garden, only an inch or so below the surface, I had found a limestone ridge, part of a fault, a spine of the *causse*. It was shattered like a fallen column, and there was good soil in the crevices. I filled them with thyme and herbs, more savory, rosemary, oregano, tarragon. The garden changed and filled but was the same place. Month after month that corner of the *causse* fed me. I worked there hearing the upland talking to itself, feeling the air pass over it. In the spring and early summer the birds were present all day and the nightingales sang until noon. The cuckoo changed its song twice, in that season. The strawberries ripened in the shade of the north and east walls. In early summer I could stand at the end of the day and look over the wall of the garden, up the lane which the sun, setting in the oak woods beyond the house and the long pasture, was flooding with dazzling yellow light, and could turn and look the other way, under the walnut tree and see the sky already the color of a plum, and across the cut, by the ruined house on the far ridge of oak trees, see the full moon rising.

As I stood watching it one evening M. Vert came down the lane and we talked of the things of summer. The long twilight stayed around us after the sun had gone down and the gold had gone out of the lane. By the twilight and moonlight we discussed the hay and the garden. The main haying was just over. The *causse* smelled of hay and honeysuckle. M. Vert pointed into the garden. He asked what was growing here and there, and I showed him, and told him, and he nodded. He stood with his chin on the wall, nodding and smiling, twisting his small pointed face, but would not come in. He told me what the garden had been like when the old woman had lived there and grown her potatoes. He forgot whether she had grown flowers too. Then he remembered that she had. In the white moonlight I put the tools away in the oven and walked with him the long way around, east along the Roman road to the paved one, and then west with the full silver white moon behind us, floating above the railroad bridge.

He told me of sinister events in the region. Sheep rustling at night. For several years it had been going on, as everyone

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knew, but recently it had been getting worse. Up on the high table land near the Black Stone, the big meteorite the color of dried blood that lay out in the open all day by itself under the sky it had fallen from, sheep had vanished from pastures. Two at a time, four at a time, six at a time. The tire tracks had been found. There were signs that the sheep had been hidden for a time in half-ruined barns out on the *causse*. A few sheep had been butchered right there. The dogs had found the remains. It had been happening all over the *causse*. The worst had been on the night of the policemen's ball in the shopping town. During the dancing. The rustlers had been busy that night. Four or five places on the upland.

"Keep an eye on the pasture," he said. "But they won't come there. All the way down the lane. They know somebody would see them. The dogs would bark."

The moonlight made him think of a trick he had pulled as a young man. He told me of a sickness of cows called The White. A fatal chill, he said, in which they are covered with a white frothy sweat. We were walking up the road that was silvered with moonlight, our shadows stretching out ahead of us growing darker as we walked, though the sky was still light in the west.

"I brought a cow home from the fair," he said, "and two nights later I heard her breathing hard, gasping for breath." He gasped and gagged to show me how it sounded. "I opened the barn door and there she was, as white as that. At first I thought maybe it was the moonlight, eh?" He stopped, facing me, to make his point. Then we walked on up the hill. "Like snow," he said. And then he told me what he had done after that, how he had got her warmed and given her hot medicine so that she seemed to recover, for a few days.

"But they never recover from that," he said, darkly.

"I got her to the next fair, along with some others," he told me, "and she looked all right; if you didn't know. And I sold her well."

And again he said it had looked just like moonlight. He was glad to have the hay in. Elated. Last week the hay from the valley. This week the hay from the upland fields and from the

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shallow valley up behind us. We returned to the subject of the old woman who had lived in the ruin, and he told me that his mother knew more about her than he did, and we would ask her when we got to the house and she could tell me what she remembered, while he was milking—he was late tonight. But when we got there his mother had already gone to bed.

When I went by the next afternoon and saw her out in the courtyard arranging flowers, long petalled dahlias, in a jar, it was not a good time to talk. The doctor was expected any moment. He was coming to see her. Her heart, she said. And she was arranging the flowers for the doctor's visit. "I love flowers," she said. "And I don't like to have anything the matter with me. I'm not used to it, you know." She laughed. "But I'm old. Just the same, one doesn't want to go. The day is never long enough." She was eighty-seven. The doctor never turned up, that day.

That spring, while I had been away, M. Vert had cut down many of the oak trees at the far end of the pasture, to make more room for more grazing. He put the cows in there more often than before, and they spent most of the day almost out of sight, in the shade of the farthest trees. From the house I could not see the rawness of the stumps, the tangles of cut brush, the stacks of logs sawn for firewood. The grass still appeared to run all the way to the woods, which seemed to be a little farther away. Serins were nesting in the rafters of the stone porch. The sheep were turned into the pasture at night, and spent the first hours, usually, up close to the house, near the water trough. I could hear their hooves on the stones, the teeth tearing the grass off short, the jaws grinding.

At the hayloft window I read of Vietnam, of Watergate, suffering and shame. Piled by a deck chair, the Abbé Breuil, Blake, Radin, Dante, Virginia Woolf, Basho, Turgenev, the *Odyssey*, Rilke, *Twelfth Night*, Follain, Thoreau, Elizabeth Bishop. I put out the light. From the open window I watched the gray shadows of the sheep moving below me. From the other window, facing south, I saw a row of square lights suddenly emerge, as from the wing of a stage, at the edge of the field where it dipped toward the small valley beyond. The late

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train. Shadows at the windows. Lives. The rank of yellow rays moved over the field like fingers crossing a table, showing the lower ground in an alien glow, the vanes of light turning. Then they were swallowed up. I had scarcely heard the train. The silence came back hardly brushed by the sounds that slipped through it. I went down the dark stairs and out into the courtyard. In the night sky the long wands of the aurora borealis swayed, sank, vanished, returned. Some nights I slept out on the threshing floor and watched the moon pass through the branches of the old acacia, turning pink before it set. A woodpecker worked on the acacia trunk in the moonlight. A barn owl came to the top of the tower and shrieked to the mice in the pasture.

Some mornings the summer sun rose bright red, in mist. Stonechats sounded like clapped pebbles outside the kitchen. Magpies echoed them over and over from the edge of the woods. A large falcon slipped among the walnut boughs. Black kites, up from the valley, sailed over, adjusting their tails to the wind as though they were surfaces of water. Goldfinches clicked in the thistles. Woodlarks disappeared along the foot of the wall, where their nests were. One morning, heavy wind and black sky, and that evening a bat flew up and down the stairs of the house, and then out a window, and back, and out, and then the night was still. In the morning the summer had entered its next age, and butterflies, hundreds of them, clung to the south wall above the demolished oven. They were there all day. I went around to look, in the afternoon, on my way down to the garden. Powder blue ones, yellow ones, fluttering on the warm stones in their one summer.

As the afternoon sun was filling the lane again with long rays before it went down, I straightened from hoeing and weeding in the garden and saw, on the other side of the wall, M. Vert's mother walking slowly toward me. She was walking slowly, with small steps, as though she were balancing as she came. From where I was standing I could not see her shadow moving ahead of her down the lane, and I was startled to see her advancing in that buoyant light. She was just across the wall and I had not heard her.

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I greeted her with surprise. It had been weeks since I had seen her at all.

"I just wanted to go for a little turn," she said. "I felt that I wanted to. It's such a beautiful evening. It was such a beautiful day.

"Besides," she said, "I wanted to see for myself. I wanted to see the house. My son told me about it, the way it is now. I wanted to see your garden. It's good to see it as a garden again. I was thinking about that, and I wanted to see it. It's lovely what you have done."

I asked her whether it looked at all as it had when the old woman had lived there.

"Oh, it's different. But she liked to grow things there too, and she had flowers, I remember, she had them there, and there. Not so many, maybe, but she had to keep the goats out, you know," she laughed. "And she was old. She kept the goats there." She pointed to the eastern end of the ruin, the wall that had held up the lean-to roof against the house. Brambles filled the old goat shed.

"She liked it, living there," she said. "She was alone."

"Was it her family's?"

"Oh yes. They were all shepherds. She was the last. She had a few sheep. And the goats. I saw her come and go here. Almost every day we talked. She was older than I was. Like my mother, maybe, or older. She washed her dishes there at the window. She used to sing. Old songs. Like the shepherds, you know. People sang then. Everybody sang. That was how it was. When they worked in the fields together they sang. We all used to sing." She laughed.

"When did it stop?"

"Oh, I don't know. Not so long ago. We sang until the war."

I asked her to come in and sit down, but she said no, she was fine where she was. She liked to see for herself.

"I remember when she died," she said. "That was years ago. The roof was there then, the door was there. I brought the sheep back up along the lane here in the evening like this and she was not here. She was not at home. I could see. The key was in the lock and the door was closed. There was a gate along

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here with a wooden latch. I took the sheep up to the barn on the green. It is not there any more. Only some of the stones. I came up to the barn and her dog came up to me. My dog knew him and let him alone. I put the sheep in the barn and left my dog in there with them. I came out and her dog was waiting and wanted me to go with him. He took me along to a pasture she had there, a little way down the lane on the other side of the green, going toward the village—it went all the way then. The sun was down and he led me there, and she was sitting up, in the pasture, on the grass, with her back to the wall and her head tipped forward as though she had fallen asleep sitting up, you know, watching the sheep. She had some knitting in her lap. She was good at that. She made things, all the time. And that's how it was.

"I couldn't believe she was gone, even after the funeral. I came back, in the evening, past the empty house. It went to a nephew, he was in the village, and he didn't care. I was sorry when the roof was taken off. And when the door was taken away. What a beautiful evening."

Again I asked her in, to sit down.

"No," she said. "I'm going. I came to visit and I've done it."

"I'll walk along with you."

"No. Thank you. I'm fine. I'm fine. I came all this way by myself. I'll be all right."

"But it's all rocky along there."

"I know. I'll be all right."

"I'm very glad you came."

"So am I."

And we said good evening and I watched her teeter down the lane and over the rocks, slowly, and I walked under the truffle oaks and through the marjoram to the wall in the farthest corner from the garden to watch her slip out of sight climbing down the rough end of the lane, and then turned to look at the evening through the ruined house across the cut, by the lime tree, and went back up to put the tools away, and then along the lane to the house, and to M. Vert's farm for the milk. She was already home, and in bed.

"She went for a walk," M. Vert said as he milked.

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"She came to visit me."

"She took it into her head. She said she wanted to go for a walk. By herself. She wanted to see the green and the house and your garden. So she went, like that."

"I was anxious about her coming back, on the path."

"She didn't want anybody with her, she said. She was tired when she came in, she said. That's all."

"She told me about finding the old woman who lived in the house by the garden, the night she died."

"She wanted to tell you that, she said."

We went on explaining it all to each other without understanding anything. A few nights later she had pains in her chest and they sent for the doctor but by the time he got there she was unconscious and by the morning she was dead. The cemetery of the commune was on a steep slope facing southwest. It was a small group at the churchyard. Cars always had a hard time parking outside it, along the road, on the hill. At one moment during the ceremony I turned and looked up the slope behind me and saw Michel's mother in her everyday faded dress, with no hat, standing at a distance, watching.

Late in the summer there was an exhibit, "Shepherds and Sheep," in the market town, in the medieval municipal building, from which most of the offices had been removed. Some of the panes in the old casement windows were broken. The rooms had been painted the pale butterscotch color called "*crème*" early in the century. There were posters: "The Shepherd. An Exhibition," with the head of a sheep. "A Thousand Years of Shepherds," with a sepia photograph of a man in a cloak, with a dog. There were shepherds' crooks and cloaks on the walls, carding combs, spinning wheels, sheep bells of all sizes. Paintings, photographs. Not much. The exhibit had been announced on the bulletin boards of the Syndicat d'Initiative and a few tourists wandered in, going somewhere else. On the wall there was a large, long, photograph of the country just outside the town, and a record of local dances was playing over a P.A. system—a remote, marginal continuo. It was not at once clear whether it was part of the exhibit or the record player of some neighbor across the narrow street.

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I went from there, one afternoon, to an ancient mill farm where the owners, who had become friends of mine by then, had taken to raising trout in the mill race. The matriarch at the farm, and a contemporary of hers who lived up on the hill near them, both made willow baskets, and she kept a pile to sell. I brought home some trout in a basket. On my way across the valley I saw the big falcon again, as I waited at a railroad crossing while the train came through very slowly, the driver high in the air at his wheel. The train, for some reason, was scarcely moving. The whole world stopped while it glided through the crossing and along the line. Then the gates went up like an intake of breath. Just before those of us who were waiting resumed our ways I saw the country for an instant, the broad bending valley, the limestone cliffs where the Gauls had held out, the edges of the uplands, green and amber and white in the light of the late afternoon, late summer. Stone facades on the slopes, towers above the trees.

I crossed the river and went under the railroad bridge and on up the empty valley: plowed fields and walnut trees along the bottom, woods around the side. And emerged at the top at a stone well with an iron arch above it, no longer used: the site where several lanes came together, the palm of an open hand. A stone cross at the corner of a wall. Beyond it the broad *causse* with its huge sky. It had rained in the morning after a long drought, and there were still dark clouds rushing over the upland. The gray stones, the plowed fields, the dark of the woods looked washed, the colors clear. The last piles over the *causse* were easy and I always went slowly to make them last, looking at it all again.

I went out through the kitchen into the pasture and brought in some brush for the fire. The sloe bushes were loaded with night-colored fruit, washed by the rain. I stopped to watch the sunset. The sky more vast than ever, after the rain. One enormous sweep of the west an intense luminous orange through which two jet trails hung glowing scars. Farther to the north the whole sky was a green turquoise, the color an old man once told me meant that there was an earthquake coming somewhere, and balconies were about to fall. As I stood there

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watching, the sheep were turned into the pasture. I could not see the gate nor who had brought them. They flowed out into the open, a gray river, with their bells and their baa-ing. The wool had grown back and all but hidden the purple number with which they had been stamped a month or so earlier. The numbers went up to more than a hundred and forty—both flocks together, the one for local consumption, and the others. They spread across the pasture in the long sunset light, and drifted to the far end, and out of sight. A few of them paused at the water basin and at the salt licks in yellow plastic basins. I looked at the lambs saved from the spring, part of the home flock, big as the others by now, but the faces still short, the eyes less prominent, looking out to the west, across the pasture, to the lower pasture, where they all seemed to be going, to spend the night. I imagined looking at the pasture as a place where I would spend the night, and how I would see it. I wondered at their going straight to the lower pasture that way, before dark. It must have something to do, I decided, with the rain on the grass, after the drought.

I went down to the garden to pick corn and beans to have with the trout that evening. The train went through the cut as I picked, going south. I scarcely noticed it any more. It was twilight still when I came up the lane, but when the lights went on indoors it turned dark outside.

As I was cooking in the vaulted kitchen I heard the train whistle in the dip beyond the pasture, before the tunnel. The northbound train. The sounds were clear like the colors, after the rain. The night was cool, the breeze from the pasture coming through the kitchen door. The main summer all at once was over. Long, distant note of the whistle. A young driver, I thought. I stepped out of the door into the pasture. The turquoise sky had turned yellow. When I came back in, the big room looked enormous, with its wide fireplace and high ceiling full of shadows, its long table, the old lamp hanging over it, the stone floor that was cold in all seasons. As I set the table I thought I heard a motorcycle, a strange sound, in the lane. Going and then passing again, and I looked out but saw nothing. Then the evening was quiet.

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Under the hayloft window the *causse* was silent, the sheep nowhere near the house. I sat in the dark looking out at the deep night above the walnut trees and the pasture. From that window with its wide view across the woods and ridges there was not a light to be seen. Only the stars, with the clouds moving across them.

Then the sound of motors. Headlights turning, coming from the green, the beams sweeping the walls. Michel's dogs quiet. I saw two 2CV's ease out into the pasture, one behind the other, and watched the red tail lights bob like the quarters of running sheep until they disappeared in the first dip, retracing the route that I had taken a few hours earlier to fetch brush for the fire. The lights reappeared, searching part of the pasture, picking up some of the sheep, which stood, and then ran back into the dark. The cars disappeared again. I sat thinking of the stories about sheep rustling, but could not believe that the cars were up to anything of the kind, coming with their lights on, no attempt at secrecy. And Michel's dogs had not barked once. Suddenly I was seized with a feeling that something terrible was happening, and that it was already under way, and I was just sitting there. I went down the stairs with no light, and crossed the big room and let myself out the back, through the kitchen. Not knowing who was there, I took a flashlight but did not turn it on. I climbed the fence into the pasture.

Walking fast, in the dark, I felt as though I had been picked up and was being carried along through the night air. A few brambles and eglantines brushed my face but none of them hurt me. I could not have run there so surely in the daytime. I heard sheep near me, heard them run, pause, then rush away. Their bells made little sound. I remembered how loud they had sounded a few nights earlier.

I came in sight of the cars again, turning, catching more sheep in their headlights. Then turning to drive along the line of cut brush full of birds, at the end of the pasture, and out of sight again at the lower end. I followed, across the dip, the groove of valley that appears to be nothing but broken stones, where a vineyard was growing. I missed the stakes and vines

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and followed to the break in the sloe hedge, and the lower pasture. There was no way out of there for a car, except the way it came in. An imprudent spot to have picked if they were rustlers. The possibility seemed more and more unlikely but the feeling of dread remained.

The gate of the lower pasture was open. The cars were far ahead of me in the woods on the other side. I could not see the headlights, but I could hear voices, local voices, speaking in *patois*, and the beams of flashlights fluttered through the trees. M. Vert's voice, here and there, a choked tenor, the words wrapped in distance. Sheep ran past me like ghosts in the dark. Bells came closer, tonkled frantically, receded. Some sheep managed to run with their bells scarcely making a sound.

The moon came out, the last quarter, bitten, and I could see the sheep clearly, running, pausing, circling in small groups. Disappearing when they huddled against a wall. Some of them began to follow me. It started to rain again, with the moon shining, and the night seemed very warm. I touched sloes in the darkness, like wet fingertips.

The car lights reappeared, turned, and came toward me. I stood still at the open gate of the lower pasture. The first car came up to me and M. Vert got out and I stepped toward him.

"The sheep," he said, in a kind of rushing daze. "They got out at the bottom of the pasture. We found the place. A hole. The wall down, just a few stones. A gap in the bushes. We found it. We found where they got out. They got out. They got onto the tracks."

He stood looking up at me.

"Did you hear the train whistle?" he asked.

I said I had, a couple of hours before, while it was still light.

"Yes," he said, "still light. But the driver couldn't see them in time. He came around the bend. They were all there at the end of the cut. He blew the whistle. He put on the brake all the way. He couldn't stop in time. Right into the middle of the flock."

"What can I do to help?"

"Nothing. Nothing. We've got the living ones out."

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I looked into the car. There was a man I did not recognize. Jacinthe was driving the car behind.

"Were many killed?"

"Thirty-two. They stopped the train. It stopped. They sent somebody out right away from the station to clear the track. They called up the *poste publique* in the village to find out whose sheep they were and somebody in the village who had a pasture by the track, Ricadou, you know, he came out to see. You know, who raises the pheasants in cages. Who uses all the modern sheep feed. He was afraid they were his, got out. He went along with them, and found them. You could still see, even then. He found them there on the tracks, lying there. A few standing there by the tracks. They could read the numbers and that way they could see whose they were."

"We've got the living ones out," he said again, and I imagined he meant that they were in the back of the *fourgonette*, and peered in again, but saw none. "The ones that were hurt only," he said.

"Were there many?"

"I don't know," he shouted, jumping back into the car, wringing my hand through the open window, with his stumps of fingers, and driving off calling, "Thank you."

The passenger in the second car, Ricadou himself, with a bandage over his eye where a branch had caught him earlier, reached out and seized my hand and asked me if I would shut the gate behind them. I walked back across the pasture, hearing the voices of sheep behind me even after they were far out of earshot, and checked the gate on the green, and then walked back to the house through the dark. The rain had stopped. The moon came out again and its misted light came and went in the pasture. Smells of wet oaks, lichen, mushrooms. Of autumn. Smells of box and of sheep, the one turning into the other, sides of a door.

I returned to the lower pasture. I went along the wall with a light. An old wall, but sound, with a high thicket of sloes above it, black as cypresses. At the foot of the wall the sheep tracks appeared to be evenly stamped in the mud. The track of a sheep's hoof is a pair of drops. Two strands of barbed wire

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above the wall. The sheep were silent, wherever they were, shut in the upper pasture, or dead by the tracks, or helpless in the woods. I looked for the gap where they had got through. The light on the stones kept shining on the faces of lichens, with their rings, their shapes of ripples on pools, of amoebas, ears, clouds, galaxies. A little owl called, close beside me. The warning note of a wakened redstart.

The gap was almost nothing. A few stones had rolled down. A sheep could squeeze under the wire, snatching at the shoots under the sloes, and then going on. One had started it, the rest had followed. The pattern of tracks swerved there. They had all gone through an opening too small to have driven one of them into. A bird shifted on a branch and a few drops fell on me from the wet tree. I could not help the sheep and I turned back. In the upper pasture the lights reappeared, coming toward me.

It was M. Vert again. When I got up to him he told me that he had come to take the rest of the flock home, herding them up the lane with the car. He asked me, suddenly diffident, whether I would help him round them up, and again I was walking across the dark pasture, sending the sheep toward the gate. The stragglers became a flock. Still frightened, it yawed and smoked back and forth. I wondered why he had not brought the dog. Did he not trust him, with the bleeding sheep?

At the gate he stopped and I went over. He told me again that he was taking them home to the barn, since he hadn't been able to fix the gap in the fence, in the dark. I asked whether this was all of them.

"All except the ones that can't walk," he said. "They're still back there."

"What about them?"

"We can't do anything until tomorrow."

"They have to stay there all night?"

"The vet won't come in the dark. Saturday night."

"And the slaughterhouse?"

"It's closed. They're all closed. Closed all day. It's already Sunday."

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"What will you do? Will you shoot them?"

"No. I don't want to shoot them. The insurance inspector has to come and see them first. He won't get here before morning. Nothing can be done until the vet gets here at least. As it is we have *un million* of loss, pure loss. The most they're likely to give me is five hundred. And I might lose the insurance, any of it. They'll say it was my fault."

I had been telling myself that it had been no worse for the sheep than the end prepared for them anyway. That perhaps they had, in fact, come out of it better, escaping the frightening loading onto the trucks, the long, crammed, jolting ride to the slaughterhouse, and the arrival and the reek of blood and guts. Instead, the train taking them by surprise, the headlight rushing toward them like the sun, overwhelming them. But now M. Vert told me of the ones down in the woods by the track, and in the pasture, lying with their thin bones crushed.

"They're all right," he said. "They're not thrashing around. They have their kidneys broken." He meant, more or less literally, that their backs were broken and they could not move.

"We got them off the track," he said. "They're propped so they can't roll. They'll stay where they are until daylight. There are a few with broken legs still out in the woods but we can't do anything about that tonight. They just try to run, and get hurt worse. I'll fix them in the morning if I can, when the vet comes. I'll be able to use help then."

He told me that they had figured out how it had happened.

"The sheep were nibbling the tips of the brush that we piled along the fence. We just built it up again last week. They pulled some down and made the hole, and then they just went on through."

The flock had passed through the gate and the cars followed. I saw the tail lights of one car stop at the other side of the green, and Michel in a nightshirt talking to them through the car window. I shut the gate. It was raining again.

It was still raining and not yet daylight when I heard the cars coming back down the lane. Jacinthe opened the pasture gate. I saw Michel run across the green in his shorts and boots and get into the back of one car, and they rocked on across the

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muddy pasture. I went out through the kitchen door and followed their lights. By the time I got to the gap in the wall of the lower pasture I could see my way without a light. They had cut a path through the brush farther along, at a place where the wall had collapsed, and had trundled an old wheelbarrow through it, out to the tracks. The railroad cut and the woods were full of mist. They seemed to be working in a white cloud. The tracks, for a hundred feet, looked like the floor of a slaughterhouse, dark red. Blood, pieces of bodies, bits of heads, wool, intestines. M. Vert, his wife and daughter and Michel, had begun dragging everything off the crushed rock of the embankment to a pile at the edge of the woods by the gap. All the wool had turned darker in the night.

M. Vert was piling the larger pieces of bodies into the wheelbarrow. Where he dragged them the blood still looked fresh. The pieces sank into the wheelbarrow as he let them go. Bellies swelling. An udder. Milk on a teat. He dumped them out near a spot where he could bring the tractor. His wife and daughter, Michel and I, loaded smaller pieces into feed and fertilizer sacks and dragged the sacks to the pile.

The hurt sheep lay in the woods facing the tracks. From time to time one of them would shift a leg or try to stand, even flounder a step or two, and then fall again.

Another car eased into the lower pasture. New. Pale green. The vet. A man older than M. Vert by a decade, and over a foot taller, helped himself out of the car and looked around like a general arriving on the scene of the battle. He was the shape of the udders and bellies in the wheelbarrow, and his face was much the same color. The bulges of his body rolled under his lavender nylon shirt that fluttered in the dawn wind. He was wearing a dark pin-striped suit with a gold watch chain crossing the vest, and over the suit a long black *marchand de bestiaux*'s smock, flowing open. Thin, short hair, the scalp showing. Rubber boots. The rain stopped for his arrival. In his eye a peasant was a peasant and an animal an animal.

M. Vert deferred to him. The vet's report would make all the difference in the insurance claim. With the maimed and mutilated sheep lying under the trees, the vet launched into

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a speech about how the insurance applied to railroad rights of way. The insurance premiums were supposed to go up in each area as the railroad changed over from hand-operated crossing gates to automatic crossing gates. He and M. Vert agreed that prices of everything were going up.

"Faster than the price of meat," M. Vert said, and the vet agreed.

Then they talked about hunters. There were more of them every year. The local people were all right. They did no harm, the vet said. M. Vert was not so sure.

"They damage the fences," he said, "and never fix them."

He and the vet agreed that the real culprits were the strangers to the region, mere acquaintances of the local residents who had the right to hunt, or the sort of people who bought a little piece of abandoned land solely in order to be able to claim hunting rights. It was people like that, they both said, who left the gates open. And they returned to a subject familiar to both of them: the night a few years before when hunters had left a gate of another of M. Vert's pastures open, and several of his sheep had got out onto the tracks and had been killed.

"And the insurance paid, that time," the vet reminded M. Vert.

"Yes."

"That will make it harder this time," the vet said. "You can be fined, remember. If the railroad wants to treat it that way. It's your responsibility, remember. If they get on the tracks you're responsible."

"I know, I know."

"How many dead?"

"Thirty-two. More. Three more died in the night."

They talked of which of the sheep that had been hurt could still be taken to the slaughterhouse.

"You should have got some of them there last night," the vet said.

"I had to wait, for the insurance," M. Vert said. "I had to wait for you to see them. And the slaughterhouses were closed."

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"There's always one open for emergencies. You know that."

"I didn't think there was, any more, now that they've closed the one at Eylac which is where we always used to take them."

Eylac was where the vet lived, in a large cranberry-pink villa surrounded by a high chain-link fence. The small slaughterhouse there had been closed the year before as a result of the same campaign that M. Pouchou was waging in his commune farther up the valley, but the industrial sheep barn that was to have been built at the edge of the town to replace the closed slaughterhouse had never been started. The permit had been blocked at the prefecture. The vet had invested in the enterprise, and chose to blame the whole course of events, including the closing of the municipal slaughterhouse, on the opponents of the new industrial sheep barn. When M. Vert mentioned the slaughterhouse, he exploded.

"And what are they going to do with it now?" he asked. "Their great corpse of a building. Turn it into an asylum for all the people in the town who were afraid of the industry coming, afraid of progress? You can't stop progress."

"Ah yes," M. Vert sighed.

"They wanted to keep it residential. All residential." Eylac had a population of 317.

"So what do they have in Eylac now? The cemetery." The vet looked at me with hatred, and then turned in disgust and glanced at the injured sheep lying under the trees. He walked a few steps toward one that was having trouble breathing. M. Vert told him its back was broken. He took another few steps toward the gap in the hedge. M. Vert pointed to the place where the sheep had got through, and told him about the two with broken legs still out in the woods.

"You'd better burn them," the vet said, pointing to the dead bodies.

"I'm going to, of course," M. Vert said.

"Or The Health will fine you."

"I know."

"The wool," the vet said. "That burns too."

M. Vert nodded and said, "I burned them the last time." They walked away from the ones that were propped here and

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there, and over to the green car, and stood talking for a while. Then the vet got in and drove carefully out of the pasture.

M. Vert came back and asked me whether I would mind making a pile of brush in the near end of the upper pasture, to burn the bodies. There where I'd come to get the firewood, the night before. He told me of a big cow of his that had been killed in the woods a few years back, and how he'd burned that with diesel oil and it had worked very well. But this time we had all that brush right there.

I went up and started, carefully laying the brush of the oaks that I had watched from the window at the other end of the pasture, building a pyre some fifteen feet across, as the sun rose. M. Vert came alongside in the car.

"I'm going up for the straw," he said. He meant the load of straw on a trailer at the end of his barnyard, where he had brought it with the tractor four days before, and no one had found time to unload it, so it had stood outdoors in the rain. He drove off and I built the pile and he came back in a while with the tractor, and the high load on the trailer. The sun was well up. The air was wet. The mist was burning off, the ground was streaming here and there. The straw was bright yellow against the dead brush that was all shadows, brown, rust, and gray. We pitchforked it into the openings in the pyre.

M. Vert took the tractor down into the bottom of the lower pasture and turned it so that its back was to the wide gap in the fence. Out in the woods he tied the legs of dead sheep—those that were still attached to bodies—together with twine from the bales of straw, and then hauled them to the end of a wire-towing cable attached to the tractor. The track of a sheep's hoof is a pair of drops.

Mme. Vert, with her hands and arms stained with mud and blood, stood watching and shaking her head and saying that it wouldn't work. The bodies would fall apart, she said. But he said no, she shouldn't worry. They were fresh.

He made a pile of ten of them at the end of the cable, and tied them with wire and started up the tractor. The wire tightened and rose in the air and the pile of bodies began to move. It slid over the wet ground leaving a track in the mud and

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across stones, bits of wool, blood, the heads catching as they went on brambles and stumps. He got them up to where we had built the pyre and I stayed and piled on brush while he untied the bodies and went back for another load.

Michel came with a load of full sacks in a wheelbarrow, and dumped it out onto the pile of bodies. M. Vert came back with his second load and Michel came and went with the wheelbarrow, and I went on building the pyre higher and thicker. With the last wheelbarrow load Michel brought the heavy *serpette* that they had used to cut the hedge, and a sheep's head. The lips were black. He threw it up onto the pyre. The first thing there, by itself, like the head on the posters at the exhibit, but those were green. This one's teeth were bared. Small teeth, like children's teeth. M. Vert left with the tractor to fetch the forklift. I went on building the pyre, over the head. By the time he got back the pile was as tall as I was.

He came back driving too fast, with the forklift raised at a rakish angle, and pulled up beside the mound of bodies, slid the forklift under the edge of it and the fork rose slowly into the air with limbs and guts cascading from it, swinging, and he turned the tractor, with the load still rising, and rolled the few feet to the pyre and stopped abruptly, lowered them, withdrew the fork carefully. It had worked. He went back for load after load. The second time he kept dropping them, but he went on scooping them up until everything was on the pyre except the patch of blood and wool and mud where the pile had been, and the trail where they had been dragged there, and the bloody paths leading to that spot. It began to rain again. But the wind was turning around to the north. It was going to be clear, now that the moon was past the quarter.

Mme. Vert and Jacinthe went home in the car. Michel bade M. Vert a grave, ceremonious farewell in a low voice, with a small bow, which was returned. They shook hands, and Michel walked away across the pasture. M. Vert and I stayed to pile more brush over the bodies, and some big logs on top of the brush. M. Vert said that would be like a hearth, whatever he meant by that. And it would burn them well. And their own

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grease would burn them, he said, half talking to himself, his crumpled face sweating, flinging on more wood.

"The ones out there," he said to me, talking to himself about the sheep with broken legs, in the woods, two in one place, standing, and four in another, lying down. He was saying something he had already said to himself many times, trying to find a way around it. "The ones out there. Better not go near them yet. It makes them run.

"We have to make the pile big enough," he said. "Because of the smell. So the smoke is more wood than sheep."

But the pile was already as high as we could throw the brush. A hill, the shape of the hives and the ovens and the shelters in the walls.

"Will you light it?" he said. And I lit the straw. Oak. Three-lobed maple. Juniper. Bird sherry. Sloe. Wild plum. The lichens on the oaks and plums caught fire first and were gone in an instant as though they had practiced. The oldest creatures there. The pyre caught and we stood back from it, in the morning sun.

"I'm going to the house," M. Vert said. "I'm going to wash." I realized that we both smelled.

"I have company today," he said. "It's Sunday."

"I'll stay," I said. "But what about the ones by the tracks, there in the woods?"

"They won't move."

"What can you do for them."

"Later," he said. "Nothing to do. Nothing to do." He lurched away, on the tractor, driving too fast, and I watched the pyre. It looked enormous, roaring in the daylight, bright as a furnace door, the bodies of sheep appearing in long landscapes of fire. I circled the fire, but there was really nothing for me to do there. The morning pushed past me into the fire.

As the brush sank the bodies appeared through it, moving, the fat burning, the bones pulling apart in the orange caverns. The ash sifted through them and around them; the fire sank from its first mountain. The breeze was from the northwest, blowing the smoke with its stench of burning fat and wool and

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its scent of oak and smell of lamb chops, down toward the railroad tracks. The heat shimmered in a high column around and above the pile. A ring of ash grew around the fire. The smoke turned blue, transparent.

I went down to look at the wounded sheep in the woods. There were dogs nosing along the embankment, where the blood was turning black. They had found scraps. And they were eyeing the four sheep in the underbrush. The sheep were frightened, watching them, rolling their eyes.

The fire was burning steadily. The breeze had dropped, around noon, and the damp air was hot. I went up to the farm to tell M. Vert about the dogs. The hare-lipped daughter was in the kitchen with the serving dish. She motioned me toward the hall and the next room, which had become the dining room after the death of M. Vert's mother. M. Vert was all washed and shiny, his sparse wet hair plastered down, no hat on, his upper forehead white, his shirt white. Striped suspenders. The guests were a large silent woman with gypsy features and a loose lock of gray hair over her forehead, and two large men with round red cheeks, white foreheads, broad smiles over their soup plates when M. Vert introduced us and we all remembered that we had met before, out in the farmyard, one day when sheep were being delivered. We remembered that we had mutual friends on the *causse*. The meal paused while we rehearsed the details. Then I told M. Vert about the dogs. Mme. Vert was worried at the news, and the men said they would be down soon, to do something.

They came down to the fire with the tractor and began tossing more brush onto the charred bones and flesh, and unloaded more straw from the trailer and packed it around the edges, and we went down to the animals in the woods. By then only two of them seemed to be conscious, trying to snake their heads up sideways from the ground, pawing the air feebly with a foreleg. The other two scarcely moved. M. Vert and the younger of the men heaved them into the wheelbarrow and trundled them to the trailer that had brought the straw and laid them on it, the same two still trying to get up, heaving their heads a few inches into the air. The younger man climbed onto the trailer beside them and sat down. As the tractor started

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across the pasture he stroked the neck of the sheep that kept trying to stand.

The two with broken legs, in the woods, were exhausted, and M. Vert and the older guest went back and carried them into the guest's 2CV *fourgonette* and drove them up to the farmyard to wait, between the trailer and the entrance to the sheep barn. The man from the slaughterhouse was said to be on his way.

Everyone stood in the farmyard waiting, talking of insurance and of sheep fairs and cows. The guest's wife, and Mme. Vert, Jacinthe and the hare-lipped daughter sat on the bench outside the kitchen door turning the pages of a book of wall paper patterns, discussing which would be best for the dining room. After M. Vert's mother had died, all the rooms along the hall had been shuffled around. The present dining room had been the girls' bedroom for years, with no wallpaper at all. But now M. and Mme. Vert had moved into the room that had been M. Vert's mother's, and the girls had moved into the room that their parents had used. M. and Mme. Vert had considered giving the girls separate rooms, but had decided it wasn't necessary, Mme. Vert said, giving her guest's wife a knowing look. Jacinthe and the young man, the son, Mme. Vert told me in an aside, were engaged to be married but it had not yet been announced. Jacinthe might not want me to know. Jacinthe pretended not to have heard, but she turned red and bent over the book of patterns, and her sister giggled and covered her mouth. I congratulated Jacinthe. She smiled and I kissed her on the cheek. Her sister got up with evident impatience and stamped into the kitchen.

I congratulated the young man, and his father and M. Vert, and Mme. Vert, and the men beamed, and Mme. Vert smiled and looked at the ground.

"Your fire is a success," M. Vert said to me. "They were fat," he said, turning to his guest. "That burns well. You'll see. There won't be anything left. It may burn all night, until tomorrow, but there won't be anything."

The sun had moved around onto the four sheep lying on the trailer. I pointed it out to M. Vert.

"They don't mind," he said.

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A high red truck drove up and stopped by the gate. The butcher from a town on the *causse* where there was no question of closing the slaughterhouse. M. Vert explained to me and to his guest that this was the butcher on call over there. They always had somebody, day or night.

"Oh yes," his guest said. "Of course. Have to. Emergencies." He beamed at me.

The butcher was in his shirt sleeves. A pleasant, open face. He got out of the truck and put on a black *marchand de bestiaux* smock and walked in. Stained pants, boots. Smiling. Round, red. M. Vert went to meet him and they walked toward the sheep.

"I wasn't sure about bringing the truck in until I'd seen them," he said.

"The vet has seen them already," M. Vert said. "I told you." They were speaking in *patois.*

"And until we had agreed on the price," the butcher said.

"Oh, we'll agree, surely," M. Vert said—the ancient formula in the region at the beginning of negotiations, and a plain fact this time, when M. Vert was in no position to bargain. They walked over to the *fourgonette* and peered in. The butcher opened the back and reached in and felt the backs, through the wool. Then they turned to the trailer and he examined the four lying there, touching backs and legs, making sure the quiet ones were alive. M. Vert told him they were fat. They talked for a while out of earshot, and shook hands, and the butcher went back to the truck and drove on down the road and in from the lane through the place where the wall had been bulldozed to allow machinery to come into the farmyard.

He drove in and another man, young, silent, broad, a face like a post, got out of the other side, and they opened the back of the truck, and then the back of the *fourgonette* and began to move the two with broken legs. The younger man grabbed and hauled them by anything he could catch—legs, tail, wool—and they heaved the two sheep into the back of the truck, and the butcher climbed in and put a rope around them to hold them still. The younger man was already dragging at the ones on the trailer.

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"Don't pull them by the ear too much," the butcher said. "Don't pull all the weight by that. That's not wool. You could hurt them." They carried the sheep, together, from the trailer, and let them down like hammocks in the truck, and slammed the back shut and put the chain up. The young man got back into the truck and sat there without having exchanged a word with anybody.

"You'll have a little something," M. Vert said to the butcher.

"There's no need," the butcher said.

"Yes, yes. Have to," M. Vert said. Jacinthe appeared with glasses on a tray, and her mother handed them around. The younger man got back out of the truck to take a glass, and Jacinthe went round with the bottle from the dining room table, turning red again as she filled the glass of the young man she was engaged to. The butcher's assistant drank his glass at a gulp and then breathed out hard, Ha, and flung the last drops onto the ground, put the glass back on the tray that had been set down on the trailer, and climbed into the truck again.

M. Vert and the butcher and everyone else raised glasses to each other and drank. M. Vert and the butcher brought up the subject of fencing, speaking a little formally, in French, then slipping back into *patois* as they warmed to the subject. More fence was needed, they agreed. And it was expensive, and hard work. But no way around it. M. Vert showed the butcher the new wing of his sheep barn, the stone wall broken through to make way for the cement block extension from the side of the old barn, toward the road, and the bright tin roof.

"It gets hot in there," he said, and they agreed about that. The butcher said the new wing was fine.

"It's the only way," M. Vert said. "My brother-in-law," he said, with long-standing rancor in his voice, "kept telling me that I should go to cows, give up sheep, the way he did."

The butcher shook his head. M. Vert's guest shook his head. He told the butcher that he had a flock of young steers, and they were beautiful. He went on shaking his head.

"Oh, as for being beautiful, they're beautiful," M. Vert said.

"But they don't make money, the way things are," the guest said.

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"You can't sell a cow," M. Vert said. "I tell my brother-in-law. These last two years you can't sell a cow for anything. He can't either."

"The market's ruined," the butcher said.

"That's what I tell him," M. Vert said. "Sheep are still what brings it in. Now he talks of building a modern barn, himself."

"You'll have some more," Jacinthe said, returning with the bottle.

"No, no. That's not politeness. Honestly. I have to be going."

And they said good-bye and everyone shook hands all around, and the red truck trundled off and turned the corner and drove past the gate.

"About half price," M. Vert said to me, answering the question I had not asked. "What can you do? It's bound to be a *million* pure loss," he repeated. "Forty of them gone. I'll see the insurance man tomorrow."

I declined another glass and turned to go. "Will you be up for the milk?" he asked.

"Will that be all right?"

"Of course. Has to be. Like every night. Only it may be a little later tonight. With the guests. Come when you like. You don't mind keeping an eye on the fire?"

I told him that I did not mind.

"Keep it burning," he said. "I'll go down when I have a minute. Or my wife. Or Jacinthe. There's no danger. The woods are wet. There's no wind."

The fire had burned down and some of the black bones were protruding again. The smell of meat and grease was still in the smoke. I piled more brush onto the remains and went down the lane to the garden.

I spread sheep manure on the damp earth around the base of the one rose bush, and picked tomatoes and lettuce and corn for supper. I heard Michel scolding and cajoling his sheep, bringing them along from the woods. As he came up the lane I was standing in the corn with the basket and he stopped, and his eyes widened.

"What a catastrophe," he said.

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"Terrible," I agreed.

"How many, in the end?"

I told him.

"Did he sell the hurt ones all right?"

"Not so well. What can you expect."

"Ah yes. It happened before. Up the tracks that way. Six years ago. But there weren't so many that time. Four or five."

"Bad enough."

"Ah yes. That's how it is. My faith. You made a good fire."

"The brush was there."

"We must help our neighbors. We're neighbors."

"You're right."

"Eh, the beasts!" he exclaimed. The sheep had gone straggling up the lane, doing no particular damage, but he waved good-bye and ran after them. The clouds were low and there was no sunset as I walked back, put the vegetables in the kitchen, and went out to the fire to pile it up again. I turned to see that Michel had come to join me, and we worked together, dragging and tossing the branches, and stood watching them burn for a while. We could hear crows down along the tracks. Titmice in the wall. A hen clucking. The pasture gate was standing open and the hens were wandering in the empty expanse.

"Thirty five," Michel said. "My faith." It was about the size of his whole flock. We walked back across the pasture.

"Wait a minute," he said, and motioned me to the gate of his house. He went into the kitchen and came out in a minute cradling a small bundle held together with newspaper as though in a handkerchief.

"You eat eggs, surely, don't you?"

"Yes, of course, but there's no need—"

"You'll make an omelette, certainly."

I protested.

"We only have too many," he said. "With the hens. And we're neighbors. Take them. They're fresh, I can tell you. We give them nothing but the wheat. You can go with that. And the rest they find for themselves. You will tell me if they're good."

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At the farm M. Vert was milking, his hat against the cow. He talked of the sheep that had been killed and the ones he had sold.

"They were beautiful," he said. "They were well chosen. They were fat. I never had better. They were like flowers."

All night the fire fluttered against the black band of trees at the western end of the pasture, and all the next day, burning out at last toward evening, leaving a few smoking embers in a wide disc of ash. A few bits of bone, pieces of skull, teeth, nothing adhering to them.

The weather cleared and the hot days came back, but the pasture stayed empty. One day the two yellow plastic basins for the salt licks were gone. The water trough was emptied. M. Vert's hare-lipped daughter, with nothing to do until school re-opened, brought a puppy on a string and put it in the trough to tease it, and ran past Michel's house with it to set the dogs barking. The hens took over the pasture.

The year seemed to hang suspended, with the days turning under it. Michel's mother was sick. She had seemed to be only a little sick for a few days, but now she was in bed all day, Michel told me, leaning on the gate. Robert came that Sunday and we all talked, on the green, in low voices.

"I don't know what's the matter," Robert said. "It's age."

They went over the symptoms, sparing no detail. From the description it could have been anything.

"It's worrying," Michel said.

"We'll have to get the doctor," Robert said.

The doctor came the next day, parked on the green. Michel's sheep were folded in the farmyard just down the lane from their back garden, one of the properties that they used that did not belong to them.

"The old woman is sick," M. Vert said as he milked. "They never want the doctor. But they need her pension. What are they going to do?"

"I don't know," I said.

Michel stayed home most of the time, the next days. The sheep were folded in small fields near the green, none of which

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were his. He kept running out to make sure they had not got out through the rickety fence. He took them along the lane for an hour or so at a time. The doctor came again, and that evening Michel was very subdued.

"He says she will have to go to the home," he said. "They will have to look after her better there than I can do."

"What will you do?" I asked.

"I can look after myself," he said, "as for that. It's just that one doesn't know. What we will do."

The ambulance came a few days later and she was led out, and then she was gone. Michel followed on his bicycle. I saw him on the green the next day.

"She's well," he said. "She's even very comfortable. It's nice for her there. The national medical insurance pays for it all. It's good."

He went to see her on his bicycle, penning the sheep in the barn when he went, and taking them out at night.

"She wants to come home," he said, when we talked on the green. "But they won't let her. They say I could not look after her. The medicines. Needles. It's true. It's worrying. One doesn't know."

He confided to me a week later that she might not come back. He would have to face that. And what was he going to do?

"As for living alone, I like to live alone," Michel said. "I don't need anybody, if it comes to that."

"He'll sell his sheep," M. Vert said. "He'll have to. He can't keep them like that."

"I have the sheep," Michel said. "I have to take care of them. I like that. That's what I like to do. That's what I do. It's that it's a long way to the home. All afternoon, over there and back. In the winter I don't know."

The pasture seemed silent in the mornings of early autumn. The cicadas were still clinging to the summer. The titmice were gathering in flocks. I had been planning a trip in September and I began to pack. I told M. Vert that I would be gone, and made arrangements with him for my absence. I told

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Michel, one evening when he came up the lane in the old way, with his flock. There seemed to be fewer than I was used to seeing.

"I sold a few," he said. "They were fat, but they were getting older anyway. I would not have bred them for lambs again. It's easier like this. I only had too many."

I told him that I was going on a trip, and his eyes widened.

"You'll be back, won't you?"

"Of course," I said. "I have to take care of the garden."

"Oh, if it's only that," he said, shrugging. But then he said, "It's beautiful, your garden. I love coming past and seeing it like that."

He asked me where I was going on my travels and I told him. He looked at me, not taking in a word.

"It's far," he said, "isn't it?"

"Yes," I said.

"Is it better there?"

"No."

"It's good here, isn't it? It's good for us."

"Yes it is."

"Do you like it when you go away?" he asked.

"No. I don't like leaving."

"Why do you go?"

"There are other places I think I want to see, things I imagine I have to do there. And friends. After all, I wasn't born here."

"That's true. You weren't born here. But you're from here." He pointed to the lane.

"Thank you."

He went up the lane without saying anything more. On my way back with the milk, later that evening, he came out of his door and waved me over to his gate.

"Wait," he said. "I have something for you."

He went back in and came out with whatever it was in both hands and held it out to me.

"You'll take that," he said. "I give it to you."

It was a heavy brass cow bell, a steep, flattened cone.

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"You said to me a long time ago that you were looking for one," he said. "You said you like the sound. Of the cow bells here. It's old, this one. From when we had cows. We don't have cows any more. We haven't had them for a long time. I still have other bells. You take this one."

His door was closed when I left the green in the afternoon a few days later, but I had already said good-bye. I took the train that came through early in the evening, going north. I climbed on and watched the patches of oak woods slip past, the cliffs turning away, and the gardens, the villages, the light in the pastures, the animals standing on their long shadows.

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*April Bernard*

## The Way We Live Now

### I. Come As You Are

The difficulties, in passion,
are not news: the knot at the throat,
the lipstick that smears, the skirt
which induced such provocative hobbling
yet will not rise above the thighs.
So many comedies of the zipper,
the shoelace, and the coiffure.
Similarly, the aria will not soar
if the diva is sitting down.
We do not advocate nudity, exactly, nor
the slattern in the unbelted kimono
swigging beer from a bottle by the electric fan.
Yet how are we to stand and sing
in purple raincoats, gather rosebuds
from a moving train?
It was during the salad course,
and the fifth bottle of wine,
when a shot was fired, and the power failed,
that we realized we had not dressed for this.

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## II. The Aerialists

Vain, cantankerous, gentle,
undaunted by truths,
unconquerable as the dirt,
with such a smile. . . .

Escaped balloons graze
the rotunda dome while the reception
pastures beneath: let us float like that,
let us rise above

If I could get to the truth,
it would not be your Melvyn Douglas satin robe,
the fits of withdrawal, the late-blooming evenings,
the evil clouds of smoke, eyes that smile and sorrow
and are not fooled, as by Memling. . . .

## III. Satan Moves Mysteriously

We seek a slogan, and find only the old ones.
We need revolution, but settle
for bad manners. Who will be the one
to strip the uniform of its stars,
splash mud on the trousers of El Exigente,
while the state's borders are ringed
by lethal picket fence posts?
A few men have been towering over us,
blocking the light in the city streets.
Meanwhile, hands are blown off, crops die,
buildings implode; perishing, want, and sorrow follow.
Not enough left in my mouth to spit.

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## IV. Alternate Route

Have pity, oh have pity
for the clenched hand that beats upon the breast,
declaring, I have done this,
I have not done that, it's all been
all my fault.
But not for the woman in the red wrap dress
and pink carnation corsage
singing "Quando, Quando, Quando."
Not guilt, but accusation;
neither tears, nor mild laughter—
This is where I have found you, after all,
walking down Sixth Street on a hot day in May:
green sunglasses, black leather—
exact in period costume;
comical in passion,
redeemed, redeemed, redeemed;
ready to give up the ghosts,
to give everything away.

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*John Jackson*

## Memento Mori

Grandmother's United States washboard
Hangs on the wall as a lesson
From His Terrible Swift Sword
And the empty belly of the Depression.

After twenty-five years grandfather retired
On a pension and a watch
From the Detroit Office of Cyclops Steel.
He saluted my birth with a scotch.

Grandmother scrubbed the washboard clean
Till the threads themselves had vanished
Like the young men in the street
Who grew up famished.

The wristwatch winds itself;
The hands still move toward
The Detroit Office of Cyclops Steel
And His Terrible Swift Sword.

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*Christopher Benfey*

## Expecting

You hoarded oyster shells through the R months;
they jut from the backyard garden like unwashed ears
of earth, and listen to your footsteps growing heavier.
You can barely drag your feet along the rows
of unthinned radishes and bib lettuce.

Vices fall away from you like autumn leaves.
You've sworn off cigarettes and wine; a single mug
of coffee kicks you awake in the morning—
if nothing else does.
Wonderful
to nap in the afternoon, the long blinds
lowered, while the predicted rain ticks against
the roof. You turn your head on the pillow,
and can almost hear the thirsty soil sucking
calcium from the oyster shells.

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*Robert Morgan*

## Oxbow Lakes

The knots tied by a river
become lost ends as the tangles
and meanders separate, cut off
in the streamline of erosion,

become lost ends as the tangles
silt up in dead lakes, fatten,
in the streamline of erosion,
old bends not communicating,

silt up in dead lakes, fatten,
left to slime and whisker with sedge,
old bends not communicating
as former drafts and channels green,

left to slime and whisker with sedge,
lost in alluvial succession,
as former drafts and channels green
in the river's variorum,

lost in alluvial succession
as meanders separate, cut off
in the river's variorum,
the knots tied by a river.

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*Two Poems by Jane Hirshfield*

## Evening, Late Fall

It is not this world, then, to blame, with its red
and blue stars, yellow pears, green apples
that carry a scent which can move you to tears.
The others are not unlike this—
the women stand over sinks with their sleeves pushed back,
thin oxen lean into their yokes,
snow falls with impossible lightness in spring.
How do we bear it, then, to guess sometimes
at their lives across the dark?
How they sing as they run cotton towels across porcelain
plates?
How they are innocent?

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## To Hear the Falling World

Only if I move my arm a certain way,
it comes back.
Or the way the light bends in the trees
this time of year,
so a scrap of sorrow, like a bird, lights on the heart.
I carry this in my body, seed
in an unswept corner, husk-encowled and seeming safe.
But they guard me, these small pains,
from growing sure
of myself and perhaps forgetting.

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*Charles North*

## For a Cowper Paperweight

Not that his writing isn't moving when
it doesn't seem it should be,
owing in part, at least, to the cloud of difficulty
surrounding his difficult life,
the pleasure of the low key
and mastery of cadence—but that it is
difficult to say why some of it
should be as good as it is, the life
of the writing apart from the life.
The quiet assertions made,
assertion becomes an extended lyric
which foregoing rapture (as it foregoes
rhapsody) presents feeling in such
a way that it ascends human heights,
both detailing and depending on
the level motion of the feeling tone,
like a long headline broken up into
individual letters and presented
at random, one letter at a time
throughout long and occasionally tedious
narrative and description, the promise of sunshine
throughout a long brightly overcast afternoon.
(As though—almost—one had to compete
with the weather and lose in order
to feel anything, or as though mere utterance
blended one with what was being uttered,
in this case ground and sky, the nature
and numerous pleasures of being between.)
Nor do the exceptions in what prevails,
"I was a stricken deer, that left the herd
Long since; with many an arrow deep infixt

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My panting side was charg'd," alter
the weather of the context, while lending a sense
of extra, unrepressed life to the whole;
to a whole consisting of dullness
as well as all the other neighboring kingdoms.
A sense that pleasure is often
pleasure of recognition which doesn't depend
on prior experience—though one has had that too.
"Oh Winter, ruler of th'inverted year,
Thy scatter'd hair with sleet like ashes fill'd,
Thy breath congeal'd upon thy lips, thy cheeks
Fring'd with a beard made white with other snows
Than those of age, thy forehead wrapt in clouds,
A leafless branch thy sceptre, and thy throne
A sliding car, indebted to no wheels,
But urg'd by storms along its slipp'ry way,
I love thee, all unlovely as thou seem'st,
And dreaded as thou art!"

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*Derek Walcott*

## The Light of the World

*"Zion-ah,*
*I've got to have Zion-ah,*
*I've got to have Zion-ah*
*For the rain is falling"*
*—Bob Marley*

Marley was rocking on the transport's stereo
and the beauty was humming the choruses quietly.
I could see where the lights on the planes of her cheek
streaked and defined them, if this were a portrait
you'd leave the highlights for last, these lights
silkened her black skin, I'd have put in an earring,
something simple, in good gold, for contrast, but she
wore no jewelry. I imagined a powerful and sweet
odor coming from her, as from a still panther,
and the head was nothing else but heraldic.
When she looked at me, then away from me politely
because any staring at strangers is impolite,
it was like a statue, like a black Delacroix's
"Liberty Leading The People," the gently bulging
whites of her eyes, the carved ebony mouth,
the heft of the torso solid, but a woman's,
but gradually all of that was going in the dusk,
except the line of her profile, and the highlit cheek,
and I thought, O Beauty, you are the light of the world!

It was not the only time I would think of the phrase
in the sixteen seater transport, that hummed between
Gros Ilet and the Market with its grit of charcoal
and the reek of vegetables after Saturday's sales,
and the degenerate rumshops, outside whose bright doors

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you saw drunken women, the saddest of all things,
winding up their week, unwinding up their week.

The Market as it closed on this Saturday night
or rather in the light that was poised to be lit
on the one hand, and on the next to go out,
as I remembered a childhood of wandering gas-lanterns
hung on poles at street-corners, and the old roar
of vendors and traffic, when the lamplighter
hooked the lantern on his pole and moved on,
and the children turned their faces towards it
with eyes white as their nighties, the Market
itself was closed in its involved darkness
and the shadows quarrelled for bread in the shops,
or quarrelled for the formal custom of quarrelling
in the electric rumshops. I remember the shadows.

The van was slowly filling in the darkening depot.
I sat in the front seat, I had no need for time.
I looked at two girls, one in a yellow bodice,
and yellow shorts, with a flower in her hair,
and lusted in peace, the other less interesting.
That evening I had walked the streets of the town
where I was born and grew up, thinking of my mother
with her white hair fading in the dying dusk,
and the cramped box-houses, that seemed perverse
in their smallness, I had peeped into parlors
and watched the dark shrouding the intimate furniture
of a divan, a center-table with its wax flowers,
and the lithograph of Christ of The Sacred Heart,
and vendors still selling to the empty streets.
Sweets, nuts, sodden chocolates, nut-cakes, mints.

An old woman with a straw hat over her headkerchief
hobbled towards us with a basket, somewhere,
some distance off, was a heavier basket,
that she couldn't carry. She was in a panic.
She said to the driver: "Pas quittez moi la terre"

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which is in her patois: "Don't leave me stranded,"
which is, in her history and that of her people:
"Don't leave me on earth," or, by a shift of stress:
"Don't leave me the earth," for an inheritance,
"Pas quittez moi la terre," heavenly transport,
"Don't leave me on earth," I've had enough of it.
The bus filled in the dark with heavy shadows
that would not be left on earth, no, that would be left
on the earth, and would have to make out.
Abandonment was something they had grown used to.

And I had abandoned them, I knew that now,
sitting in the bus there, in the sea-quiet dusk,
with men sitting in canoes, and the same old lights
from the Vigie headland, and boats on the water,
I who could never solidify my shadow
to be one of their shadows, left them on their earth,
to their white rum-quarrels, and their coal-bags,
and their hatred of corporals, of all authority.
I was deeply in love with the woman by the window.
I wanted to be going home with her this evening.
I wanted her to have the key to our small house
by the beach at Gros Ilet, I wanted her to change
into a smooth white nightie that would pour like water
over the black rocks of her breasts, to lie
simply beside her by the ring of a brass-lamp
with a kerosene wick, and tell her in silence
that her hair was like a hill-forest at night,
that a trickle of rivers was in her armpits,
that I would buy her Benin if she wanted it,
and never leave her on earth. But the others too.

Because I felt a great love that brought me to tears,
and a pity that prickled my eyes like a nettle,
afraid that I might start suddenly sobbing
on the public transport with the Marley going,
and a small boy peering between the shoulders
of the driver and me, at the lights coming

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at the rush of the road in the country darkness
with lamps in the houses on the small hills,
and thickets of stars, I had abandoned them,
I had left them on earth, I left them to sing
Marley's songs of a sadness as real as the smell
of rain on dry earth, or the smell of damp sand,
and the bus felt warm with their neighborliness,
their consideration, and the polite partings

in the light of its headlamps. In the blare,
in the thud-sobbing music, the resinous scent
that came from their bodies, I wanted the transport
to continue forever, for no one to descend
and say a goodnight in the beams of the lamps
and take the crooked path up to the lit door,
guided by fireflies, I wanted the beauty
to come into the warmth of considerate wood
and the silent, relieved greeting of enamel plates
in the kitchen, and the tree in the yard,
but I came to my stop. Outside the Halcyon Hotel.
The lounge would be full of tourists like myself.
Then I would take a dark walk up the beach.
I got off the van without saying goodnight.
Goodnight would be full of inexpressible love.
They went on in their transport, they left me on earth.

Then, a few yards ahead, the van stopped. A man
shouted at me through the transport window.
I walked up towards him. He held out something.
A pack of cigarettes had dropped from my pocket.
He gave it to me. I felt closer to tears.
There was nothing they wanted, nothing I could give them
but this thing I have called "The Light Of The World."

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## XLI

The camps hold their distance—brown chestnuts and gray smoke
that coils like barbed wire. The profit in guilt continues.
Wild pigeons gurgle, squirrels pile up acorns like little shoes,
and moss, voiceless as smoke, hushes the peeled bodies
like abandoned kindling. In the clear pools, fat
trout rising to lures bubble in umlauts.
Forty years gone, in my island childhood, I felt that
the gift of poetry had made me one of the chosen,
that all experience was kindling to the fire of the Muse.
Now I see her in autumn on that pine bench where she sits,
their nut-brown ideal, in gold plaits and *lederhosen*,
the blood drops of poppies embroidered on her white bodice,
the spirit of autumn to every Hans and Fritz
whose gaze raked the stubble fields where the smoky cries
of rooks were nearly human. They placed their cause in
her cornsilk crown, her cornflower iris,
winnower of chaff for whom the swastikas flash
in skeletal harvests. But had I known then
that the fronds of my island were harrows, its sand the ash
of the distant camps, should I have broken my pen
because this century's pastorals were written
by the chimneys of Dachau, Auschwitz, and Sachsenhausen?

*A corrected galley of Derek Walcott's poem "Midsummer XLI."*

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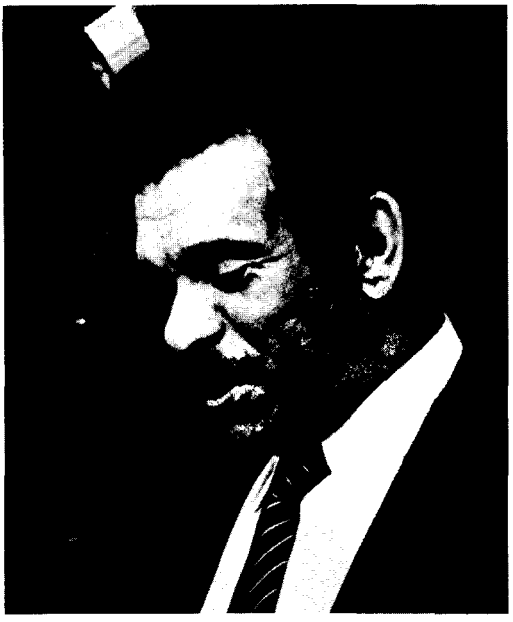

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# The Art of Poetry XXXVII
# Derek Walcott

*I went to visit Derek Walcott on his home island of St. Lucia in mid-June, 1985. St. Lucia is one of the four Windward Islands in the eastern Caribbean, a small mountainous island which faces the Atlantic Ocean on one side and the Caribbean Sea on the other. For a week Walcott and I stayed in adjacent bungalows, called "Hunt's Beach Cottages," just a few miles from the harbor city of Castries where he was born and raised. Outside of our large, mildly ramshackle cottages, a few stone tables and chairs were cemented into a strip of grass; beyond was a row of coconut trees and then, just a few yards away, what*

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*Walcott has called "the theater of the sea," the Caribbean. One is always aware of the sea in St. Lucia—an inescapable natural presence which has deeply affected Walcott's sense of being an islander, a new world poet.*

*Derek Walcott was born in 1930. He was educated at St. Mary's College in St. Lucia and at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica. For many years he lived in Trinidad—he still spends most of his summers there—where from 1959 to 1976 he directed the Trinidad Theater Workshop. Since then he has spent much of his time in the United States, living first in New York City and more recently in Boston. Currently, he holds a MacArthur Fellowship and teaches at Boston University. Walcott's first three booklets*—25 Poems *(1948),* Epitaph for the Young *(1949), and* Poems *(1951)—were privately printed in the West Indies. His mature work begins with* In a Green Night: Poems 1948–1960 *(1962) and* Selected Poems *(1964). Since then he has published seven individual poetry books:* The Castaway *(1965),* The Gulf *(1969), the book-length autobiographical poem* Another Life *(1973),* Sea Grapes *(1976),* The Star-Apple Kingdom *(1979),* The Fortunate Traveller *(1981) and* Midsummer *(1984). At the time of this interview Walcott was looking forward to the publication of his* Collected Poems—*which appeared in the winter of 1986. Considering himself equally a poet and a playwright, Walcott has also published three books of plays in America:* Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays *(1970),* The Joker of Seville and O Babylon! *(1978), and* Remembrance and Pantomime: Two Plays *(1980).*

*To live next door to Walcott, even for a week, is to understand how he has managed to be so productive over the years. A prodigious worker, he often starts at about 4:30 in the morning and continues until he has done a four or five hour stint—by the time most people are getting up for the day. On a small easel next to a small blue portable typewriter, he had recently done a pencil drawing of his wife, Norline, and a couple of new watercolors to serve as storyboards for a film version of* Pantomime *(he is doing the film script); he had also just finished the draft of an original screenplay about a steel band,*

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*as well as an extended essay about the Grenada invasion (to be called "Good Old Heart of Darkness"), and a new manuscript of poems, "The Arkansas Testament" (Spring, 1987). At the time of this interview the cuttings for two more films were all but complete: a film version of his play,* Haitian Earth *(which he had produced in St. Lucia the previous year), and a documentary film about Hart Crane for public television. At times one gets the impression that the poetry for which he is primarily known has had to be squeezed between all his other projects.*

*And yet while I was in St. Lucia, most of Walcott's other activities were suspended as he worked on a new poem, "The Light of the World." It is a homecoming poem, a narrative lyric about returning to Castries. The poem is set on a transport—what we would call a mini-bus—and characterizes the poet's sense of feeling both separated from, and connected to, the life of the people around him. Once more he is struck by the grace as well as the difficult poverty of his people; he reexperiences the beauty of St. Lucian women and feels the weight of their daily lives. "The Light of the World" is a large poem of guilt and expiation, and it gives a good sense of Walcott's inner feelings during the time of our interview.*

*Our conversation took place over three days—beginning in the late afternoon or early evening and continuing until dark. We talked at the table and chairs outside our cottages where we could hear the wind in the coconut trees and the waves breaking on the shore. A compact man in his mid-fifties, Walcott was still dressed from his afternoon on the beach—barefoot, a pair of brown beach trunks and a thin cotton shirt. Often he kept a striped beach towel draped around his shoulders, a white flour-sack beach hat pushed forward jauntily on his head. He seemed always to be either smoking or about to start.*

INTERVIEWER

I'd like to begin by asking you to talk about your family background. In many ways it was atypical for St. Lucia. For example, you were raised as a Methodist on a primarily Catho-

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lic island. Your family also seems to have been unusually oriented toward the arts.

DEREK WALCOTT

My family background really only consists of my mother. She was a widow. My father died quite young; he must have been thirty-one. Then there was my twin brother and my sister. We had two aunts as well, my father's sisters. But the immediate family consisted of my mother, my brother, my sister, and me. I remember from very early childhood my mother, who was a teacher, reciting a lot around the house. I remember coming across drawings that my father had done, poems that he had written, watercolors that were hanging in our living room—his original watercolors—and a terrific series of books: a lot of Dickens, Scott, quite a lot of poetry. There was also an old victrola with a lot of classical records. And so my family always had this interest in the arts. Coming from a Methodist minority in a French Catholic island, we also felt a little beleaguered. The Catholicism propounded by the French provincial priests in St. Lucia was a very hide-bound, prejudiced, medieval, almost hounding kind of Catholicism. The doctrine that was taught assigned all Protestants to limbo. So we felt defensive about our position. This never came to a head, but we did feel we had to stay close together. It was good for me too, to be able to ask questions as a Protestant, to question large authority. Nobody in my generation at my age would dare question the complete and absolute authority of the church. Even into sixth form, my school friends and I used to have some terrific arguments about religious doctrine. It was a good thing. I think young writers ought to be heretical.

INTERVIEWER

In an essay called "Leaving School" you suggest that the artifacts of your father's twin avocations, poetry and painting, made your own sense of vocation seem inevitable. Would you describe his creative work and how it affected you?

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WALCOTT

My mother, who is nearly ninety now, still talks continually about my father. All my life I've been aware of her grief about his absence and her strong pride in his conduct. He was very young when he died of mastoiditis, which is an ear infection. Medicine in St. Lucia in those days was crude or very minimal; I know he had to go to Barbados for operations. I don't remember the death or anything like that, but I always felt his presence because of the paintings that he did. He had a self-portrait in watercolor in an oval frame next to a portrait of my mother, an oil that was very good for an amateur painter. I remember once coming across a backcloth of a very ordinary kind of moonlight scene that he had painted for some number that was going to be done by a group of people who did concerts and recitations and stuff like that. So that was always there. Now that didn't make me a morose, morbid child. Rather, in a sense, it gave me a kind of impetus and a strong sense of continuity. I felt that what had been cut off in him somehow was an extension that I was continuing.

INTERVIEWER

When did you first discover his poems?

WALCOTT

The poems I'm talking about are not a collection. I remember a couple of funny lyrics that were done in a southern American dialect for some show he was probably presenting. They were witty little satirical things. I can't remember any poems of a serious nature. I remember more of his art work. I remember a fine watercolor copy of Millet's "The Gleaners" which we had in the living room. The original is an oil painting and even now I am aware of the delicacy of that copy. He had a delicate sense of watercolor. Later on I discovered that my friend Harold Simmons, who was a professional painter, evidently was encouraged by my father to be a painter. So there's always this continuity in my association with people

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who knew him and people who were very proud to be his friend. My mother would tell us that, and that's what I felt.

INTERVIEWER

Your book-length autobiographical poem, *Another Life*, makes it clear that two painters were crucial to your development: your mentor Harold Simmons, called Harry in the poem, and your friend Dunstan St. Omer, renamed Gregorias. Would you talk about their importance to you?

WALCOTT

Harry taught us. He had paints, he had music in his studio, and he was evidently a good friend of my father's. When he found out that we liked painting, he invited about four or five of us to come up to his studio and sit out on his veranda. He gave us equipment and told us to draw. Now that may seem very ordinary in a city, in another place, but in a very small, poor country like St. Lucia it was extraordinary. He encouraged us to spend our Saturday afternoons painting; he surrounded us with examples of his own painting. Just to let us be there and to have the ambience of his books, his music, his own supervision and the stillness and dedication that his life meant in that studio was a terrific example. The influence was not so much technical. Of course, I picked up a few things from him in terms of technique: how to do a good sky, how to water the paper, how to circle it, how to draw properly and concentrate on it, and all of that. But there were other things apart from the drawing. Mostly, it was the model of the man as a professional artist that was the example. After a while, the younger guys dropped out of the drawing thing and Dunstan St. Omer and I were left. We used to go out and paint together. We discovered it at the same time.

INTERVIEWER

Did you have a favorite painter then?

WALCOTT

The painter I really thought I could learn from was

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Cézanne—some sort of resemblance to oranges and greens and browns of the dry season in St. Lucia. I used to look across from the roof towards Vigie—the barracks were there and I'd see the pale orange roofs and the brickwork and the screen of trees and the cliff and the very flat blue and think a lot of Cézanne. Maybe because of the rigidity of the cubes and the verticals and so on. It's as if he knew the St. Lucian landscape—you could see his painting happening there. There were other painters of course, like Giorgione, but I think it gave me a lot of strength to think of Cézanne when I was painting.

INTERVIEWER

What would you say about the epiphanic experience described in *Another Life*, which seems to have confirmed your destiny as a poet and sealed a bond to your native island?

WALCOTT

There are some things people avoid saying in interviews because they sound pompous or sentimental or too mystical. I have never separated the writing of poetry from prayer. I have grown up believing it is a vocation, a religious vocation. What I described in *Another Life*—about being on the hill and feeling the sort of dissolution that happened—is a frequent experience in a younger writer. I felt this sweetness of melancholy, of a sense of mortality, or rather of immortality, a sense of gratitude both for what you feel is a gift and for the beauty of the earth, the beauty of life around us. When that's forceful in a young writer, it can make you cry. It's just clear tears; it's not grimacing or being contorted, it's just a flow that happens. The body feels it is melting into what it has seen. This continues in the poet. It may be repressed in some way, but I think we continue in all our lives to have that sense of melting, of the "I" not being important. That is the ecstasy. It doesn't happen as much when you get older. There's that wonderful passage in Traherne where he talks about seeing the children as moving jewels until they learn the dirty devices of the world. It's not *that* mystic. Ultimately, it's what Yeats says: "Such a

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sweetness flows into the breast that we laugh at everything and everything we look upon is blessed." That's always there. It's a benediction, a transference. It's gratitude, really. The more of that a poet keeps, the more genuine his nature. I've always felt that sense of gratitude. I've never felt equal to it in terms of my writing, but I've never felt that I was ever less than that. And so in that particular passage in *Another Life* I was recording a particular moment.

INTERVIEWER

How do you write? In regard to your equation of poetry and prayer, is the writing ritualized in any way?

WALCOTT

I don't know how many writers are willing to confess to their private preparatory rituals before they get down to putting something on paper. But I imagine that all artists and all writers in that moment before they begin their working day or working night have that area between beginning and preparation, and however brief it is, there is something about it votive and humble and in a sense ritualistic. Individual writers have different postures, different stances, even different physical attitudes as they stand or sit over their blank paper, and in a sense, without doing it, they are crossing themselves; I mean, it's like the habit of Catholics going into water: you cross yourself before you go in. Any serious attempt to try to do something worthwhile is ritualistic. I haven't noticed what my own devices are. But I do know that if one thinks a poem is coming on—in spite of the noise of the typewriter, or the traffic outside the window, or whatever—you do make a retreat, a withdrawal into some kind of silence that cuts out everything around you. What you're taking on is really not a renewal of your identity but actually a renewal of your *anonymity* so that what's in front of you becomes more important than what you are. Equally—and it may be a little pretentious-sounding to say it—sometimes if I feel that I have done good work I do pray, I do say thanks. It isn't often, of course. I don't do it every day. I'm not a monk, but if something does happen

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I say thanks because I feel that it is really a piece of luck, a kind of fleeting grace that has happened to one. Between the beginning and the ending and the actual composition that goes on, there is a kind of trance that you hope to enter where every aspect of your intellect is functioning simultaneously for the progress of the composition. But there is no way you can induce that trance.

Lately, I find myself getting up earlier, which may be a sign of late middle-age. It worries me a bit. I guess this is part of the ritual: I go and make a cup of coffee, put on the kettle, and have a cigarette. By now I'm not too sure if out of habit I'm getting up for the coffee rather than to write. I may be getting up that early to smoke, not really to write.

INTERVIEWER

What time is this?

WALCOTT

It can vary. Sometimes it's as early as half-past three, which is, you know, not too nice. The average time would be about five. It depends on how well I'm sleeping. But that hour, that whole time of day, is wonderful in the Caribbean. I love the cool darkness and the joy and splendor of the sunrise coming up. I guess I would say, especially in the location of where I am, the early dark and the sunrise, and being up with the coffee and with whatever you're working on, is a very ritualistic thing. I'd even go further and say it's a religious thing. It has its instruments and its surroundings. And you can feel your own spirit waking.

INTERVIEWER

Recently, I heard you say that you were deeply formed by Methodism. How?

WALCOTT

In a private way, I think I still have a very simple, straightforward foursquare Methodism in me. I admire the quiet, pragmatic reason that is there in a faith like Methodism, which is

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a very practical thing of conduct. I'm not talking about a fanatical fundamentalism. I suppose the best word for it is "decency." Decency and understanding are what I've learned from being a Methodist. Always, one was responsible to God for one's inner conduct and not to any immense hierarchy of angels and saints. In a way I think I tried to say that in some earlier poems. There's also a very strong sense of carpentry in Protestantism, in making things simply and in a utilitarian way. At this period of my life and work, I think of myself in a way as a carpenter, as one making frames, simply and well. I'm working a lot in quatrains, or I have been, and I feel that there is something in that that is very ordinary, you know, without any mystique. I'm trying to get rid of the mystique as much as possible. And so I find myself wanting to write very simply cut, very contracted, very speakable and very challenging quatrains in rhymes. Any other shape seems ornate, an elaboration on that essential cube that really is the poem. So we can then say the craft is as ritualistic as that of a carpenter putting down his plane and measuring his stanzas and setting them squarely. And the frame becomes more important than the carpenter.

INTERVIEWER

*Another Life* suggests that eventually you gave up painting as a vocation and decided to concentrate on poetry. Recently, though, you seem to be at work on your watercolors again. What happened?

WALCOTT

What I tried to say in *Another Life* is that the act of painting is not an intellectual act dictated by reason. It is an act that is swept very physically by the sensuality of the brushstroke. I've always felt that some kind of intellect, some kind of preordering, some kind of criticism of the thing before it is done, has always interfered with my ability to do a painting. I am in fairly continual practice. I think I'm getting adept at watercolor. I'm less mucky. I think I could do a reasonable oil painting. I could probably, if I really set out, be a fairly good

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painter. I can approach the sensuality. I know how it feels, but for me there is just no completion. I'm content to be a moderately good watercolorist. But I'm not content to be a moderately good poet. That's a very different thing.

INTERVIEWER

Am I correct that you published your first poem, "The Voice of St. Lucia," at the precocious age of fourteen? I've read that the poem stirred up a considerable local controversy.

WALCOTT

I wrote a poem talking about learning about God through nature and not through the church. The poem was Miltonic and posed nature as a way to learn. I sent it to the local papers and it was printed. Of course, to see your work in print for any younger writer is a great kick. And then the paper printed a letter in which a priest replied (in verse!) stating that what I was saying was blasphemous and that the proper place to find God was in church. For a young boy to get that sort of response from a mature older man, a priest who was an Englishman, and to be accused of blasphemy was a shock. What was a more chastising thing was that the response was in verse. The point of course was to show me that he was also capable of writing verse. He did his in couplets and mine was in blank verse. I would imagine if I looked at both now that mine was better.

INTERVIEWER

Most American and English readers think of *In a Green Night* as your first book. Before you published abroad, however, you had already printed three booklets at your own expense in the West Indies. How did you come to publish the first one, *25 Poems*?

WALCOTT

I used to write every day in an exercise book, and when I first wrote I wrote with great originality. I just wrote as hard and as well as I felt. I remember the great elation and release I felt, a sort of hooking on to a thing, when I read Auden,

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Eliot, and everyone. One day I would write like Spender, another day I would write like Dylan Thomas. When I felt I had enough poems that I liked, I wanted to see them in print. We had no publishing house in St. Lucia or in the Caribbean. There was a Faber collection of books that had come out with poets like Eliot and Auden, and I liked the type-face and how the books looked. I thought, "I want to have a book like that." So I selected a collection of twenty-five of them and thought, "Well, these will look good because they'll look like they came from abroad; they'll look like a published book." I went to my mother and said, "I'd like to publish a book of poems, and I think it's going to cost me two hundred dollars." She was just a seamstress and a schoolteacher, and I remember her being very upset because she wanted to do it. Somehow she got it; —a lot of money for a woman to have found on her salary. She gave it to me, and I sent off to Trinidad and had the book printed. When the books came back I would sell them to friends. I made the money back. In terms of seeing a book in print, the only way I could have done it was to publish it myself.

INTERVIEWER

Frank Collymore wrote a very appreciative essay about your early poetry. That must have been a heady experience for a nineteen year-old. After all, he was the editor of the groundbreaking Caribbean literary magazine, *Bim*, a man that Edward Braithwaite once called "the greatest of West Indian literary godfathers."

WALCOTT

Frank Collymore was an absolute saint. I got to know him through Harry Simmons. I have never met a more benign, gentle, considerate, selfless person. I'll never forget the whole experience of going over to Barbados and meeting him. To be treated at that age by a much older man with such care and love and so on was wonderful. He treated George Lamming the same way. There are people like that, people who love other people, love them for their work and what it is. He was

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not by any means a patronizing man. He never treated you as if he were a schoolmaster doing you good. I had great fortune when I was young in being treated like that by people, by people much older than I was who treated me, who treated my mind, as if I were equal to them. He was the best example of that.

INTERVIEWER

You once described yourself at nineteen as "an elated, exuberant poet madly in love with English" and said that as a young writer you viewed yourself as legitimately prolonging "the mighty line" of Marlowe and Milton. Will you talk about that sense of yourself?

WALCOTT

I come from a place that likes grandeur; it likes large gestures; it is not inhibited by flourish; it is a rhetorical society; it is a society of physical performance; it is a society of style. The highest achievement of style is rhetoric, as it is in speech and performance. It isn't a modest society. A performer in the Caribbean has to perform with the right flourish. A Calypsonian performer is equivalent to a bullfighter in the ring. He has to come over. He can write the wittiest Calypso, but if he's going to deliver it, he has to deliver it well, and he has to hit the audience with whatever technique he has. Modesty is not possible in performance in the Caribbean, and that's wonderful. It's better to be large and to make huge gestures than to be modest and do tiptoeing types of presentations of oneself. Even if it's a private platform, it is a platform. The voice does go up in a poem. It is an address, even if it is to oneself. And the greatest address is in the rhetoric. I grew up in a place in which if you learned poetry, you shouted it out. Boys would scream it out and perform it and do it and flourish it. If you wanted to approximate that thunder or that power of speech, it couldn't be done by a little modest voice in which you muttered something to someone else. I came out of that society of the huge gesture. And literature is like that, I mean *theatrical* literature is like that, whether it's Greek or whatever. The reci-

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tation element in poetry is one I hope I never lose because it's an essential part of the voice being asked to perform. If we have poets we're really asking them, "Okay, tell me a poem." Generally the implication is, "Mutter me a poem." I'm not in that group.

INTERVIEWER

There is a confident, fiery sense of privilege in your early work. In a recent poem, *Midsummer*, you write "Forty years gone, in my island childhood, I felt that/the gift of poetry had made me one of the chosen,/that all experience was kindling to the fire of the Muse."

WALCOTT

I never thought of my gift—I have to say "my gift" because I believe it is a gift—as anything that I did completely on my own. I have felt from my boyhood that I had one function and that was somehow to articulate, not my own experience, but what I saw around me. From the time I was a child I knew it was beautiful. If you go to a peak anywhere in St. Lucia, you feel a simultaneous newness and sense of timelessness at the same time—the presence of where you are. It's a primal thing and it has always been that way. At the same time I knew that the poor people around me were not beautiful in the romantic sense of being colorful people to paint or to write about. I lived, I have seen them and I have seen things that I don't need to go far to see. I felt that that was what I would write about. That's what I felt my job was. It's something that other writers have said in their own way, even if it sounds arrogant. Yeats has said it; Joyce has said it. It's amazing Joyce could say that he wants to write for his race, meaning the Irish. You'd think that Joyce would have a larger, more continental kind of mind, but Joyce continued insisting on his provinciality at the same time he had the most universal mind since Shakespeare. What we can do as poets in terms of our honesty is simply to write within the immediate perimeter of not more than twenty miles really.

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INTERVIEWER

How does your sense of discovery of new subject matter integrate with the formal elements in your work?

WALCOTT

One of the things that people have to look at in West Indian literature is this: that what we were deprived of was also our privilege. There was a great joy in making a world which so far, up to then, had been undefined. And yet the imagination wants its limits and delights in its limits. It finds its freedom in the definition of those limits. In a sense, you want to give more symmetry to lives that have been undefined. My generation of West Indian writers has felt such a powerful elation at having the privilege of writing about places and people for the first time and, simultaneously, having behind them the tradition of knowing how well it can be done—by a Defoe, a Dickens, a Richardson. Our world made us yearn for structure as opposed to wishing to break away from it because there was no burden, no excess of literature in our heads. It was all new.

INTERVIEWER

Well, then how do you see yourself in terms of the great tradition of poetry in the English language?

WALCOTT

I don't. I am primarily, absolutely a Caribbean writer. The English language is nobody's special property. It is the property of the imagination: it is the property of the language itself. I have never felt inhibited in trying to write as well as the greatest English poets. Now that has led to a lot of provincial criticism: the Caribbean critic may say, "You are trying to be English," and the English critic may say, "Welcome to the club." These are two provincial statements at either end of the spectrum. It's not a matter of trying to be English. I am obviously a Caribbean poet. I yearn for the company of better Caribbean poets, quite frankly. I feel a little lonely. I don't see what I thought might have happened—a stronger energy, a

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stronger discipline, and a stronger drive in Caribbean poetry. That may be because the Caribbean is more musical: every culture has its particular emphasis and obviously the Caribbean's poetry, talent, and genius is in its music. But then again the modern Caribbean is a very young thing. I consider myself at the beginning, rather than at the end, of a tradition.

INTERVIEWER

Would you say that your relationship to English poetry has changed over the years? As your work has progressed you seem to have increasingly affiliated yourself with a line of New World poets from Whitman through St. John Perse to Aimé Césaire and Pablo Neruda.

WALCOTT

Carlos Fuentes talked in a *Paris Review* interview about the essential Central American experience, which includes the whole basin of the Caribbean—that it is already a place of tremendous fertility. The whole new world experience here is shared by Márquez as it is by Borges, as it is still by American writers. In fact, too many American poets don't take on the scale of America. Not because we should write epics but because it seems to be our place to try to understand. In places that are yet undefined the energy comes with the knowledge that this has not yet been described, this has not yet been painted. This means that I'm standing here like a pioneer. I'm the first person to look at this mountain and try to write about it. I'm the first person to see this lagoon, this piece of land. Here I am with this enormous privilege of just being someone who can take up a brush. My generation of West Indian writers, following after C. L. R. James, all felt the thrill of the absolute sense of discovery. That energy is concomitant with being where we are; it's part of the whole idea of America. And by America, I mean from Alaska right down to Curaçao.

INTERVIEWER

How do you respond to V. S. Naipaul's repeated asser-

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tion—borrowed from Trollope—that "Nothing was created in the British West Indies"?

WALCOTT

Perhaps it should read that "Nothing was created *by the British* in the West Indies." Maybe that's the answer. The departure of the British required and still requires a great deal of endeavor, of repairing the psychological damage done by their laziness and by their indifference. The desolation of poverty that exists in the Caribbean can be very depressing. The only way that one can look at it and draw anything of value from it is to have a fantastic depth of strength and belief, not in the past but in the immediate future. And I think that whenever I come back here, however desolate and however despairing I see the conditions around me to be, I know that I have to draw on terrible reserves of conviction. To abandon that conviction is to betray your origins; it's to feel superior to your family, to your past. And I'm not capable of that.

INTERVIEWER

Why is the figure of Robinson Crusoe so important to you?

WALCOTT

I wrote a poem called "The Castaway." I told my wife I was going to stay by myself for a weekend somewhere down in Trinidad. My wife agreed. I stayed in a beachhouse by myself and I wrote the poem there. I had an image of the West Indian artist as someone who was in a shipwrecked position. I'm not saying that's the origin of my Crusoe idea. But it's possible. The beaches around here are generally very empty—just you, the sea, and the vegetation around you, and you're very much by yourself. The poems I have written around the Crusoe theme vary. One of the more positive aspects of the Crusoe idea is that in a sense every race that has come to the Caribbean has been brought here under situations of servitude or rejection, and that is the metaphor of the shipwreck, I think. Then you look around you and you have to make your own

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tools. Whether that tool is a pen or a hammer, you are building in a situation that's Adamic; you are rebuilding not only from necessity but also with some idea that you will be here for a long time and with a sense of proprietorship as well. Very broadly that is what has interested me in it. There are other ironies, like the position of Friday as the one who is being civilized. Actually, the reverse happens. People who come out to the Caribbean from the cities and the continents go through a process of being recultured. What they encounter here, if they surrender to their seeing, has a lot to teach them, first of all the proven adaptability of races living next to each other, particularly in places like Trinidad and Jamaica. And then also in the erasure of the idea of history. To me there are always images of erasure in the Caribbean—in the surf which continually wipes the sand clean, in the fact that those huge clouds change so quickly. There is a continual sense of motion in the Caribbean—caused by the sea and the feeling that one is almost traveling through water and not stationary. The size of time is larger—a very different thing in the islands than in the cities. We don't live so much by the clock. If you have to be in a place where you create your own time, what you learn, I think, is a patience, a tolerance, how to make an artisan of yourself rather than being an artist.

INTERVIEWER

Your recent play *Pantomime* explores the racial and economic side of the relationship between Crusoe and Friday. In the play, a white English hotel owner in Tobago proposes that he and his black handyman work up a satire on the Crusoe story for the entertainment of the guests. Is the play a parable about colonialism?

WALCOTT

The point of the play is very simple. There are two types. The prototypical Englishman is not supposed to show his grief publicly. He keeps a stiff upper lip. Emotion and passion are supposed to be things that a trueblood Englishman avoids. What the West Indian character does is to try to wear him

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down into confessing that he is capable of such emotion and there's nothing wrong in showing it. Some sort of catharsis is possible. That is the main point of the play. It's to take two types and put them together, put them in one arena and have that happen. I have never thought of it really as a play about racial conflict. When it's done in America, it becomes a very tense play because of the racial situation there. When it's done here, it doesn't have those deep historical overtones of real bitterness. I meant it to be basically a farce that might instruct. And the instruction is that we can't just contain our grief, that there's purgation in tears, that tears can renew. Of course, inside the play there's a point in which both characters have to confront the fact that one is white and one is black. They have to confront their history. But once that peak is passed, once the ritual of confrontation is over, then that's the beginning of the play. I've had people say they think the ending is corny, but generally that criticism has come when I'm in America. The idea of some reconciliation or some adaptability of being able to live together, that is sometimes rejected by people as being a facile solution. But I believe it's possible.

INTERVIEWER

How would you differentiate your work of the middle and late sixties, *The Castaway* and *The Gulf*, from your previous writing?

WALCOTT

There's a vague period in any poet's life between thirty and forty that is crucial because you can either keep working in one direction, or you can look back on your earlier work as juvenilia, a nice thing to look at from a distance. You have to head toward being forty with a certain kind of mindset to try to recreate chaos so you can learn from it. Yet you also have the fear that your work really has been basically mediocre, a failure, predictable. You find yourself at a point at which you say, ah, so you have become exactly what you were afraid of becoming: this person, this writer, with a certain name and a certain thing expected of you, and you are fulfilling that

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mold. The later books attempt to work against the given identity. At this point I don't think they're deep enough in terms of their sense of sin. Their sense of guilt could be more profound. In a way a lot of these poems smooth over while seething underneath the surface. One can always put a sort of poster over the rough, you know. A smoothness of attitude over something that's basically quite null and chaotic and unsettling. A lot of the roughness is missing in these books, but then that dissatisfaction continues all one's life.

INTERVIEWER

Would you talk about your experience in the Trinidad Theater Workshop which you founded in 1959 and finally left in 1976? You once stated that you wanted to create a theater where someone could produce Shakespeare and sing Calypso with equal conviction. Did the idea succeed?

WALCOTT

Yes, I think I made that happen. The best West Indian actors are phenomenal. Most West Indian actors have gone to West Indian secondary schools. The classical training and reading they get there is pretty wide and impressive—a lot of Shakespeare, and all the great English writers. Once that happens people read much more widely than if they hadn't done the great poets. So most West Indian actors have a familiarity with the classic theater of the English language. They also have an accent, not an affected accent, but a speech that is good diction. Some of the finest Shakespeare I have ever heard was spoken by West Indian actors. The sound of Shakespeare is certainly not the sound we now hear in Shakespeare, that androgynous BBC-type, high-tone thing. It's a coarse thing—a great range between a wonderful vulgarity and a great refinement, and we have that here. We have that vulgarity and we also have that refinement in terms of the diction. The West Indian actor has a great rhetorical interest in language. In addition to that, the actor is like the West Indian writer in that he is a new person: what he is articulating has just begun to be defined. There's a sense of pioneering. For me writing plays

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was even more exciting than working on poems because it was a communal effort, people getting together and trying to find things. When I won a fellowship to go to America in 1958, I wanted to have, much as the Actors Studio did, a place where West Indian actors, without belonging to any company, could just come together and try and find out simple things such as how to talk like ourselves without being affected or without being incoherent, how to treat dialect as respectfully as if we were doing Shakespeare or Chekhov, and what was our own inner psychology as individuals, in a people, as part of a people. The first couple of years we had a very tough time. Very few people would come. We didn't know what we were doing; we just improvised and explored and tried things. I was determined not to do a production until I thought we had some kind of ensemble. I had no intention of forming a company. At that time, all I wanted to do was to have the actors come and begin to work together. It took a very long time. But eventually we did put on a play and for about seventeen years I had a terrific company. It also began to involve dancers and some great actors. I remember Terry Hands came once (he is now one of the associate directors of the Royal Shakespeare Company) for a performance of *The Joker of Seville* that Margaret, my then wife, suggested we do. We had this little arena, like a bullfight ring, or a cockfight ring, and we served sandwiches and coffee and oranges and so on, and the crowd by that time had begun to know the songs and they were singing along with the actors. Terry said to me, "Derek, you're doing what Brecht tried to do." Well, I felt terrific because I knew what he meant. Brecht's idea of the participation of the audience, the whole idea of the boxing ring as a stage or the stage as an arena, had happened. But after several years of falling out and fighting and coming back together, eventually, for all sorts of reasons, the thing wore down. Although I still use actors from the company singly, I no longer run the company. But seventeen years is a long time to run a theater company.

INTERVIEWER

You've written that you first began writing drama "in the

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faith that one was creating not merely a play, but a theater, and not merely a theater, but its environment." But by the time you came to write the prologue to *Dream on Monkey Mountain* in 1970, the feeling of pride was replaced mainly by exhaustion and the sense of innocence seems to have given way to despair. What happened?

WALCOTT

Well, right now I'm writing a play called *A Branch of the Blue Nile*—about actors, a small company of actors and how they fall apart. I don't know up to now—and I'll have to decide pretty quickly—if it's going to end badly. The epiphany of the whole thing, the end of it, is a question that remains.

INTERVIEWER

Is the problem at all related to questions of whether the state should support the arts?

WALCOTT

I'm fifty-five now and all my life I've tried to fight and write and jeer and encourage the idea that the state owes its artists a lot. When I was young it looked like a romance; now that I'm older and I pay taxes, it is a fact. But not only do I want roads, I want pleasure, I want art. This is the terrible thing in the Caribbean. The middle class in the Caribbean is a venal, self-centered, indifferent, self-satisfied, smug society. It enjoys its philistinism. It pays very short lip-service to its own writers and artists. This is a reality every artist knows. The point is whether you say that and then turn your back on it and say to hell with it for life. I haven't done that and I don't think I'm capable of doing it. What's wrong is this: a legacy has been left by the British empire of amateurism. What we still have as an inheritance is that art is an amateur occupation. That attitude is combined with some of the worst aspects of bourgeois mercantilism, whether it is French, Danish, British, or Spanish bourgeois. The whole of the Caribbean that I can think of has this stubborn, clog-headed indifference to things around them. The philanthropy that exists in the Caribbean

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is negligible. Money is here—you just have to see the houses and the cars, and to look at the scale of living in any one of these islands—but nobody gives anything. If they do, I don't know what they give to, but that penny-pinching thing is typical of the petty-bourgeois merchant, the hoarder of money. Without any bitterness I can say that anything that I have gotten, whether earned or not, has been from America and not from the Caribbean.

INTERVIEWER

What constitutes an artistic generation in the Caribbean?

WALCOTT

An artistic generation in this part of the world is about five years. Five years of endurance. After that, I think people give up. I see five years of humanity and boredom and futility. I keep looking at younger writers, and I begin to see the same kind of despair forming and the same wish to say the hell with it, I'm getting out of here. There's also a problem with government support. We have come to a kind of mechanistic thinking that says, a government concerns itself with housing, food, and whatever. There will always be priorities in terms of sewage and electricity. If only a government could form the idea that any sensible human being wants not only to have running water, but a book in hand and a picture on the wall. That is the kind of government I had envisaged in the Caribbean when I was eighteen or nineteen. At fifty-five, I have only seen an increase in venality, an increase in selfishness, and worse than that, a shallow kind of service paid to the arts. I'm very bitter about the philistinism of the Caribbean. It is tough to see a people who have only one strength and that is their culture. Trinidad is perhaps the most concentrated example of a culture that has produced so many thousands and thousands of artisans at Carnival. Now Carnival is supported by the government, but that's a seasonal kind of thinking. I'm talking about something more endemic, more rooted, more organic to the idea of the Caribbean. Because we have been colonies, we have inherited everything and the very thing we used to think was

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imperial has been repeated by our own stubborness, stupidity, and blindness.

INTERVIEWER

Your prologue to *Dream on Monkey Mountain* also blasts the crass, state-sponsored commercialization of folk culture. One of your subjects in both poetry and essays has been how negatively tourism has affected the West Indies. Would you discuss that?

WALCOTT

Once I saw tourism as a terrible danger to a culture. Now I don't, maybe because I come down here so often that perhaps literally I'm a tourist *myself* coming from America. But a culture is only in danger if it allows itself to be. Everybody has a right to come down in the winter and enjoy the sun. Nobody has a right to abuse anybody, and so I don't think that if I'm an American anybody should tell me, please don't come here because this beach is ours, or whatever. During the period I'm talking about, certainly, servility was a part of the whole deal—the waiters had to smile, and we had to do this and so forth. In tourism, it was just an extension really of master/servant. I don't think it's so anymore. Here we have a generation that has strengthened itself beyond that. As a matter of fact, it can go beyond a balance and there's sullenness and a hostility toward people who are your guests. It can swing too far as well. But again, it's not enough to put on steel bands and to have people in the hotels entertaining and maybe to have a little show somewhere to keep them what they think is light-minded and happy and indifferent and so on. If that's the opinion that the government or culture has of itself, then it deserves to be insulted. But if it were doing something more rooted in terms of the arts, in terms of its writers, its painters, and its performers, and if there were more pride in that and not the kind of thing you see of guys walking around town totally bored and hoping that something can happen. . . . I'm not one to say that you can't do things for yourself because certainly having spent all my life in the Caribbean theater and

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certainly seventeen very exacting years in the workshop, I do say, yes—get up and do it yourself and stop depending on the government. But there is a point where you have to turn to the state and say, "Look man, this is ridiculous. I pay my taxes. I'm a citizen. I don't have a museum. I don't have a good library. I don't have a place where I can perform. I don't have a place where I can dance." That's criminal. It's a carry-over of the same thing I said about the West Indies being seized and atrophied by a petty-bourgeois mentality from the metropolis that has been adopted by the Creole idea of life which is simply to have a damn good time and that's it, basically. I mean that's the worst aspect of West Indian life: have a good time, period.

INTERVIEWER

What do you have against folklorists and anthropologists? Some people think of them as an intellectually respectable lot.

WALCOTT

I don't trust them. They either embarrass or elevate too much. They can do a good service if they are reticent and keep out of the way. But when they begin to tell people who they are and what they are, they are terrifying. I've gone to seminars in which people in the audience who are the people the folklorists are talking about, are totally baffled by their theories.

INTERVIEWER

One of your most well-known early poems, "A Far Cry from Africa," ends with the question, "How can I turn from Africa and live?" However, by 1970 you could write that "The African revival is escape to another dignity," and that "Once we have lost our wish to be white, we develop a longing to become black, and those two may be different, but are still careers." You also assert that the claim to be African is not an inheritance but a bequest, "a bill for the condition of our arrival as slaves." These are controversial statements. What is your current sense of the West Indian writer's relationship to Africa?

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WALCOTT

There is a duty in every son to become his own man. The son severs himself from the father. The Caribbean very often refuses to cut that umbilical cord to confront its own stature. So a lot of people exploit an idea of Africa out of both the wrong kind of pride and the wrong kind of heroic idealism. At great cost and a lot of criticism, what I used to try to point out was that there is a great danger in historical sentimentality. We are most prone to this because of suffering, of slavery. There's a sense of skipping the part about slavery, and going straight back to a kind of Eden-like grandeur, hunting lions, that sort of thing. Whereas what I'm saying is to take in the fact of slavery, if you're capable of it, without bitterness, because bitterness is going to lead to the fatality of thinking in terms of revenge. A lot of the apathy in the Caribbean is based on this historical sullenness. It is based on the feeling of "Look what you did to me." Well, "Look what you did to me," is juvenile, right? And also, "Look what I'm going to do to you," is wrong. Think about illegitimacy in the Caribbean! Few people can claim to find their ancestry in the linear way. The whole situation in the Caribbean is an illegitimate situation. If we admit that from the beginning that there is no shame in that historical bastardy, then we can be men. But if we continue to sulk and say, "Look at what the slave-owner did," and so forth, we will never mature. While we sit moping or writing morose poems and novels that glorify a nonexistent past, then time passes us by. We continue in one mood, which is in too much of Caribbean writing: that sort of chafing and rubbing of an old sore. It is not because one wishes to forget; on the contrary, you accept it as much as anybody accepts a wound as being a part of his body. But this doesn't mean that you nurse it all your life.

INTERVIEWER

*The Fortunate Traveller* is filled with poems set in a wide variety of places. The title poem itself elaborates the crisis of a fortunate traveller who goes from one underdeveloped country to another. And in "North and South" you write that "I

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accept my function/as a colonial upstart at the end of an empire,/a single, circling, homeless satellite." Has the Castaway given way to the Traveller? Do you still feel the old tugs between home and abroad?

WALCOTT

I've never felt that I belong anywhere else but in St. Lucia. The geographical and spiritual fixity is there. However, there's a reality here as well. This afternoon I asked myself if I would stay here for the rest of my life if I had the chance of leaving. The answer really is, I suppose, no. I don't know if I'm distressed by that. One is bound to feel the difference between these poor, dark, very small houses, the people in the streets, and yourself because you always have the chance of taking a plane out. Basically you are a fortunate traveller, a visitor; your luck is that you can always leave. And it's hard to imagine that there are people around you unable, incapable of leaving either because of money or because of any number of ties. And yet the more I come back here the less I feel that I'm a prodigal or a castaway returning. And it may be that as it deepens with age, you get more locked into what your life is and where you've come from and what you misunderstand and what you should have understood and what you're trying to reunderstand and so on. I'll continue to come back to see if what I write is not beyond the true experience of the person next to me on the bus—not in terms of talking down to that person, but of sharing that person's pain and strength necessary in those pathetically cruel circumstances in which people have found themselves following the devastations of colonialism.

INTERVIEWER

What led you to assert, as you do in *Midsummer*, that "to curse your birthplace is the final evil"?

WALCOTT

I think it is. I think the earth that you come from is your mother and if you turn around and curse it, you've cursed your mother.

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INTERVIEWER

You've written a number of poems about New York City, Boston, old New England, and the southern United States. I'm thinking in particular of the first section of *The Fortunate Traveller* where one of the poems is entitled "American Muse" and another asserts "I'm falling in love with America." What are your feelings about living in the United States? Do you think you've been Americanized in any way?

WALCOTT

If so, voluntarily. I don't think I've been brainwashed. I don't think I have been seduced by all the prizes and rewards. America has been extremely generous to me—not in a strictly philanthropical sense; I've earned that generosity. But it has given me a lot of help. The real thing that counts is whether that line is true about falling in love with America. That came about because I was travelling on a bus from one place to another, on a long ride looking at the American landscape. If you fall in love with the landscape of a place the next thing that comes is the people, right? The average American is not like the average Roman or British citizen. The average American doesn't think that the world belongs to him or her; Americans don't have imperialist designs in their heads. I find a gentleness and a courtesy in them. And they have ideals. I've travelled widely across America and I see things in America that I still believe in, that I like a lot.

INTERVIEWER

What are your feelings about Boston, which you have called the "city of my exile"?

WALCOTT

I've always told myself that I've got to stop using the word "exile." Real exile means a complete loss of the home. Joseph Brodsky is an exile; I'm not really an exile. I have access to my home. Given enough stress and longing I can always get enough money to get back home and refresh myself with the sea, the sky, whatever. I was very hostile about Boston in the

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beginning, perhaps because I love New York. In jokes, I've always said that Boston should be the capital of Canada. But it's a city that grows on you gradually. And where I live is very comfortable. It's close to the university. I work well there, and I very much enjoy teaching. I don't think of myself as having two homes; I have one home, but two places.

INTERVIEWER

Robert Lowell had a powerful influence on you. I'm thinking of your memorial poem "RTSL" as well as the poem in *Midsummer* where you assert that "Cal's bulk haunts my classes." Would you discuss your relationship to Lowell?

WALCOTT

Lowell and Elizabeth Hardwick were on a tour going to Brazil and they stopped off in Trinidad. I remember meeting them at Queen's Park Hotel and being so flustered that I called Elizabeth Hardwick, Edna St. Vincent Millay. She said, "I'm not that old yet." I was just flabbergasted. And then we became very friendly. My wife Margaret and I took them up to the beach. Their daughter, Harriet, was there. I remember being up at this beach house with Lowell. His daughter and his wife, I think, must have gone to bed. We had gas lanterns. *Imitations* had just come out and I remember that he showed me his imitations of Hugo and Rilke and asked me what I thought about them. I asked him if two of the stanzas were from Rilke, and he said, "No, these are mine." It was a very flattering and warm feeling to have this fine man with this great reputation really asking me what I thought. He did that with a lot of people, very honestly, humbly, and directly. I cherish that memory a lot. When we went back to New York, Cal and Lizzy had a big party for us with a lot of people there, and we became very close. Cal was a big man in bulk but an extremely gentle, poignant person, and very funny. I don't think any of the biographies have caught the sort of gentle, amused, benign beauty of him when he was calm. He kept a picture of Peter, my son, and Harriet for a long time in his wallet, and he'd take it out and show it to me. He was sweetly impulsive. Once I went to

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visit him and he said, "Let's call up Allen Ginsberg and ask him to come over." That's so cherishable that it's a very hard thing for me to think of him as not being around. In a way, I can't separate my affection for Lowell from his influence on me. I think of his character and gentleness, the immediacy that was part of knowing him. I loved his openness to receive influences. He was not a poet who said, "I'm an American poet, I'm going to be peculiar, and I'm going to have my own voice which is going to be different from anybody's voice." He was a poet who said, "I'm going to take in everything." He had a kind of multifaceted imagination; he was not embarrassed to admit that he was influenced even in his middle-age by William Carlos Williams, or by François Villon, or by Boris Pasternak, all at the same time. That was wonderful.

INTERVIEWER

What about specific poetic influence?

WALCOTT

One of the things he said to me was, "You must put more of yourself in your poems." Also he suggested that I drop the capital letters at the top of the line, use the lower-case. I did it and felt very refreshed; it made me relax. It was a simple suggestion, but it's one of those things that a great poet can tell you that can be phenomenal—a little opening. The influence of Lowell on everyone, I think, is in his brutal honesty, his trying to get into the poetry a fictional power that wasn't there before, as if your life was a section of a novel—not because you are the hero, but because some of the things that were not in poems, some of the very ordinary banal details, can be illumined. Lowell emphasized the banality. In a sense to keep the banality banal and still make it poetic is a great achievement. I think that's one of the greatest things that he did in terms of his directness, his confrontation of ordinariness.

INTERVIEWER

Would you tell the story of your first poetry reading in the

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States? It must have been rewarding to hear Lowell's extravagant introduction.

WALCOTT

Well, I didn't know what he said because I was in back of the curtain, I think it was at the Guggenheim. I was staying at the Chelsea Hotel, and that day I felt I needed a haircut, so, foolishly, I went around the corner and sat down. The barber took the electric razor and gave me one of the wildest haircuts I think I've ever had. It infuriated me, but you can't put your hair back on. I even thought of wearing a hat. But I went on anyway, my head looked like hell. I had gotten some distance into the reading—I was reading "A Far Cry From Africa"—when suddenly there was the sound of applause from the auditorium. Now I had never heard applause at a poetry reading before. I don't think I'd ever given a formal poetry reading, and I thought for some reason that the applause was saying it was time to stop, that they thought it was over. So I walked off the stage. I felt in a state of shock. I actually walked off feeling the clapping was their way of saying, "Well, thank you, it's been nice." Someone in charge asked me to go back and finish the reading, but I said no. I must have sounded extremely arrogant, but I felt that if I went back out there it would have been conceited. I went back to Trinidad. Since I hadn't heard Lowell's introduction, I asked someone for it at the Federal Building, which had archives of radio tapes from the Voice of America. I said I would like to hear the Lowell tape, and the guy said, "I think we erased that." It was only years later that I really heard what Cal said, and it was very flattering.

INTERVIEWER

How did you become friends with Joseph Brodsky?

WALCOTT

Well, ironically enough, I met Brodsky at Lowell's funeral. Roger Straus, Susan Sontag, and I went up to Boston for the funeral. We waited somewhere for Joseph, probably at the air-

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port, but for some reason he was delayed. At the service I was in this pew when a man sat down next to me. I didn't know him. When I stood up as the service was being said, I looked at him and I thought, if this man is not going to cry then *I'm* not going to cry, either. I kept stealing glances at him to see if anything was happening, but he was very stern looking. That helped me to contain my own tears. Of course it was Brodsky. Later, we met. We went to Elizabeth Bishop's house, and I got to know him a little better. The affection that developed after that was very quick and, I think, permanent—to be specific about it is hard. I admire Joseph for his industry, his valor, and his intelligence. He's a terrific example of someone who is a complete poet, who doesn't treat poetry as anything else but a very hard job that he does as well as he can. Lowell worked very hard too, but you feel in Joseph that that is all he lives for. In a sense that's all any of us lives for or can hope to live for. Joseph's industry is an example that I cherish a great deal.

INTERVIEWER

When did you first become friends with Seamus Heaney?

WALCOTT

There was a review by A. Alvarez of Seamus's book, a very upsetting review—to put it mildly—in which he was describing Heaney as a sort of blue-eyed boy. English literature always has a sort of blue-eyed boy. I got very angry over the review and sent Seamus a note via my editor with a little obscenity in it. Just for some encouragement. Later, in New York we had a drink at someone's house. From then on, the friendship has developed. I see him a lot when he is in Boston at Harvard. I just feel very lucky to have friends like Joseph and Seamus. The three of us are outside of the American experience. Seamus is Irish, Joseph is Russian, I'm West Indian. We don't get embroiled in the controversies about who's a soft poet, who's a hard poet, who's a free verse poet, who's not a poet, and all of that. It's good to be on the rim of that quarreling. We're on the perimeter of the American literary scene. We can float

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out here happily not really committed to any kind of particular school or body of enthusiasm or criticism.

INTERVIEWER

Over the years your style seems to have gotten increasingly plainer and more direct, less gnarled, more casual, somehow both quieter and fiercer at the same time. Is that an accurate assessment of the poetic style of your middle age? I can't imagine a book like *Midsummer* from the young Derek Walcott.

WALCOTT

It varies, of course. When I finished *Another Life*, I felt like writing short poems, more essential, to the point, things that were contracted. They didn't have the scale of the large book and so on. It goes in that kind of swing, in that kind of pendulum. In the case of *Midsummer*, I felt that for the time being I didn't want to write any more poems, although that sounds arrogant. I just felt perhaps I was overworking myself. I was going to concentrate purely on trying to develop my painting. While painting, I would find lines coming into my head. I would almost self-destruct them; I'd say, all right, I'll put them down . . . but with antipoetic vehemence. If they don't work, then I'll just forget it. What kept happening is that the lines would come anyway, perhaps out of that very irritation, and then I would make a very arbitrary collage of them and find they would take some sort of loose shape. Inevitably, of course, you try to join the seams. I was trying to do something, I think, that was against the imagination, that was not dictated in a sort of linear, lyrical, smooth, melodic—but rather something that was antimelodic. For a poem, if you give a poem personality, that's the most exciting thing—to feel that it is becoming antimelodic. The vocabulary becomes even more challenging, the meter more interesting, and so on. So what happened was that by the very wish not to write, or to write a poem that was against the idea of writing poems, it all became more fertile and more contradictory and more complex. Gradually a book began to emerge. Inevitably you can't leave things lying around with unjoined shapes, little fragments and so on.

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I began to weld everything together—to keep everything that I felt worthwhile. I thought, well, whether this is just an ordinary thing or not, it has as much a right to be considered as something a little more grandiose. That's what I think happened in *Midsummer.*

INTERVIEWER

How do you feel about publishing your *Collected Poems*?

WALCOTT

You're aware of the fact that you have reached a certain stage in your life. You're also aware that you have failed your imagination to some degree, your ambitions. This is an amazingly difficult time for me. I'm absolutely terrified. It's not because I have a kind of J. D. Salinger thing about running away from publicity. It's really not wanting to see myself reflected in that way. I don't think that that's what the boy I knew—the boy who started to write poetry—wanted at all, not praise, not publicity. But it's troubling. I remember Dylan Thomas saying somewhere that he liked it better when he was not famous. All I can say is this: I do have another book about ready, and I hope it will be a compensation for all the deficiencies in the *Collected Poems*, something that will redeem the *Collected Poems*.

—**Edward Hirsch**

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*Two Poems by Eugenio Montale*

## Autumn Cellars

on which the lunar spring descends,
blanching every shard with halo splendor,
chips of broken cones, sheen
of drying nets, splinters,

back to us, across the cold
will come the bounty of a hand,
shining over the far horizon will come
the white horde, to loot and plunder.

## To Liuba, Leaving

Not the cricket, but the cat
on the hearth, shining
household god of your scattered clan,
is now your oracle.
The house you carry
snugly around you—birdcage, bandbox?—
rides these blind days, light as an ark
on the tide—and suffices your salvation.

*translated from the Italian*
*by William Arrowsmith*

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*James Schuyler*

## Simone Signoret

*for Jane & Joe Hazan*

Look, Mitterand baby, your telegram
of condolence to Yves
Montand tells it like it is
but just once can't some high
placed Frenchman forget about the
*gloire de France* while the world
stands still a moment and all
voices rise in mourning
a star of stars:
Simone Signoret was and is
immortal
(thanks to seeming permanence
yes the silver screen? *l'écran*?)
Simone Signoret, A.K.A.
Mme Yves Montand is dead: Let's
reread Tennyson's Ode
to the Duke of Wellington
with subtle emendations:
after all Simone never brought
about deaths by zillions on
a battlefield: no simply adult
entertainment as ambiguous
women beginning
with "Dédé d'Anvers": Dédé
mixes with wrong type
waterfront layabouts in
Antwerp and of course
she became some sort of

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"star overnight" so let's for-
get about Academy Award
winner "Room at the Top" and
turn full attention to
"Casque d'Or" meaning
"Golden Helmet" and here
in this still in today's
Times she is wearing
her golden helmet of hair
and musing on the strange
destiny that right at the be-
ginning she does a circular
dance with her soon-to-be
lover (one arm behind back
one arm hangs straight down)
and he's a carpenter (we
find out all about that) and
utterly evil Claude Dauphin
and at the end she watches
from a window his execution—
friend lover, that is, not
well-disposed-of Dauphin—
and she, staring and staring
implacably staring, woman
with mysterious eyes, under
a smooth brushed helmet
of golden hair: I always
remember you like that
and we used to quaff
liquid refreshments in
the same mid-town Parisian
bar (Christ, that was long
ago) and I wondered who
the hell is this Simone
Signoret
and what's so great about
"Dédé d'Anvers" (I still

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haven't seen it): Simone
(may I call you Simone
just this once?) tonight
one star in the real sky
the starry firmament
goes out and the rest
the stars, the stars!
shine more brightly for
that star of stars
with almond-eyes
and a well-brushed
helmet of golden hair
and I truly miss you
Simone Signoret

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*Two Poems by Jennifer Rose*

## On Losing the Sense of Smell

In my arms, lilacs like a former lover—
no heartbeat, no elevator.
The garden pantomimes its tactics. Now

the ocean arrives too soon: flora
the only clue before the roar of blue.
I forget what it is to be far away

and still know I am near. The wind is
an empty boat. Overboard, bouquets
of memory. Nostalgia cannot translate

mnemonics. Summer goes black and white.

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## Strawberries

These strawberries announce desire like roosters,
Their reveille lasting till well past noon.
No mouth domesticates their primal sirens,
No apron can carry enough sweet souvenirs.

Our mouths are primed for kisses like these each morning,
Your beard soft as the straw between these rows
Of berries. My hands search the shadows.
Everywhere buds are turning to tongues.

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*Howard Nemerov*

## Night Operations, Coastal Command RAF

Remembering that war, I'd near believe
We didn't need the enemy, with whom
Our dark encounters were confused and few
And quickly done, so many of our lot
Did for themselves in folly and misfortune.

Some hit our own barrage balloons, and some
Tripped over power lines, coming in low;
Some swung on takeoff, others overshot,
And two or three forgot to lower the wheels.

There were those that flew the bearing for the course
And flew away forever; and the happy few
That homed on Venus sinking beyond the sea
In fading certitude. For all the skill,
For all the time of training, you might take
The hundred steps in darkness, not the next.

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*William Logan*

## The Duck Pond

Beneath a sky whose hardened violets
still chase a warm front's temperatures along,
the mockingbird and mourning dove create
what colder climates recognize as song.

The sluggish stream that intersects the street
is dammed for ducks, for whom its overflow
presents a danger they are pleased to skirt.
The weeds are sallow, the waterfall too low.

Reversals were our topic those weak Junes,
though then we hardly knew their harsh intent.
Along the pond, the lovers dined in twos,
pretending their dull menus would relent.

The children of the local cult had crumbed
the day's stale bread upon the water's slate.
Their parents, dressed in red, held back. A pond
erases every line its shore creates.

Distress was not a face I recognized
in yours, or mine, or any other life.
It shows how easy it was then to ignore.
Whoever saw you, saw you as a wife.

Now other things have changed. On summer nights
mosquito trucks whine back and forth in pairs,
their arcs of spray conspiring to present
blank invitations to black-tie affairs.

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*Alfred Corn*

## Lost and Found

No one but the prodigal returns.
Extravagance, the same as parsimony,
disguised a bent for pillaging oneself?
To keep the homeward track, though, asked not dwelling
on the irrecoverable, not counting how many
moons were spent, fistfuls of coin sent rolling
on the green baize at 2 AM, the jokes,
riots, banquets laid for spangled throngs
whose bellowed toasts would fan the smoky uproar.

Amusement scaled like a mountain, rapture
run through and shed like a skin,
the protocols of aftermath
gestured their subject into a valley
it took pain to unlock the meaning of—
as though along with ripped-out checks
sown left and right had fled some blunt specie
of imperception, a former deafness
to mumbled fear that clambered up now
from a foxhole, or grief betrayed
by signs tenuous as ragged breathing
in a darkened room till now ignored
though it had waited there half a life.

Home: the blessed ordeal of being
irreplaceable, forgiven, ushered down
a dim passage of hand-polished memories,
and left alone among their silent welcome.
The young master a beggar in beat-up shoes?—
Whose sister steals in with cloth and basin,
eyes widening at the dust that streaks his face.

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The world collects its debts, that is its job.
But she, with the clairvoyant ease
of the long-standing ancillary, smiles
and touches on favorite instances
of childhood mutiny that saw them together
ferreting up and down the stairs, partners
in adventure, those days. . . .
And he will do what now?
First, for his father's sake, accept the honor
of one more feast, traditional, the milk-fed calf
solemnly slaughtered and presented—fresh substance,
new life—to all the household.
Then take up whatever tasks fall to his hand—
husbandry, repairs, accounts, improvements—
and find a path to terms with his brother's
righteous indignation, gnarled
and rooted like the olive tree.

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*Bin Ramke*

## A Father Failing

If a man walks with one hand on the baby carriage
As he argues with the mother but picks blossoms
From the park trees to fold into the carriage
And *does* love the child beyond endurance
While his tiny trinity walks toward the iron gate
On its way home, the child now one face
Among the baffling faces of flowers, a bristling
Rolling cushion of cherry limbs, and the woman
Wants to love the man but cannot forgive
And watches the carriage filling like a heart
With pink wounds, no one fatal, but all
Broken carelessly by a man beautiful
But beyond touch, beyond loss and longing,
And the woman sees her own eyes
Among the blossoms filled with questions
And desire, and the sun shines through
The straw brim of her hat in a lattice pattern
Onto her forehead, and there are other
Walkers in the park, and all the men
Are breaking blossoming branches
With the best of intentions and hope for forgiveness,
How long can babies and trees survive, how soon
Will the world tire of good intentions and bad husbands?

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*Sharon Olds*

## The Beetle

*for my father*

When I go to the bathroom I see a beetle in the tub,
black, with a band of stone color
around the center, granite with a trace of
lichen on it, luminous on a damp day,
and I wonder if it's a death-watch beetle,
and I think of your death,
I wonder if the cancer will take
a long time or a short time
and I wonder if death-watch beetles are the beetles
that eat the dead. I think of you buried,
I think of the beetles that will eat your body, I would like
to be one of them.
After you die, in my sleep I would like to
turn into one of those beetles and
eat my way through you all night
in calm beetle life. I want to
have whatever I can of you,
I want to eat those years of darkness and silence,
to taste your life, to eat the head
you turned away.
I even want to eat the cancer,
work my way slowly through the greyish
slightly hot mass, to know you.
Your eye, tongue, if you have no more use for your body
I have always wanted it,
I never liked the way the other god's body
dissolved on the tongue, now I come with my
strong dark jaws—your life in my
body *is* my life, I want to use it with
real physical rage and physical love.

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*Eamon Grennan*

## Totem

All Saints' over, the roast seeds eaten, I set
On a backporch post our sculpted pumpkin under the weather,
Warm still for November. Night and day it gapes
In at us through the kitchen window, going soft
In the head. Sleepwalker-slow, a black rash of ants
Harrows this hollowed globe, munching the pale peach
Flesh, sucking its seasoned last juices dry. In a
Week, when the ants and humming flies are done, only
A hard remorseless light drills and tenants it through
And through. Within, then, it turns mouldblack
In patches, stays like this for days while the weather
Takes it in its shifty arms: wide eyespaces shine, the
Disapproving mouth holds firm. Another week, a sad
Leap forward: sunk to one side so an eyesocket's almost
Shut, it becomes a monster of its former self. Human,
It would have rotted beyond unhappiness and horror
To some unspeakable solitary subject state, its nose
No more than a vertical hole, the thin bridge of amber
Between nose and mouth in ruins. The other eyesocket
Opens wider than ever in disbelief. It's all
Downhill from here: peremptory steady fingers of frost
And knuckles of sun strain all day and night at it,
Cracking the rind, kneading the knotted fibres
Free. The crown with its topknot mockery of stalk
Caves in; the skull buckles; the whole head begins
To drip tallowy tear-sized drops. Surely the end
Is in sight. A day or two more topples it in on itself
Like ruined thatch, pus-white drool spidering from
The corner of the mouth and worming down the
bodypost.
All dignity to the winds, it bows its bogeyman

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Face of dread to the inevitable. And now, November
Almost out, it is in the bright unseasonable sunshine
A simmer of pulp, a slow bake, its amber shell speckled
Chalkgrey with lichen. Light strikes and strikes its
Burst surfaces: it sags, stays, at the end of its brief
Tether, helmet of dark circles, death-caul. Here
Is the last umbilical gasp, everybody's nightmare parent,
The pitiless system rubbing our noses in it. But
Pity poor lanternhead with his lights out, glob
By greasy glob going back where he came from. As each
Seed-shaped drop falls free, it catches and clutches
For a split second the light. When the pumpkin
Lapses to our common ground at last—where a white
Swaddle of snow will fold it in no time from my
Sight—I try to take in the empty space it's left
On top of the wooden post: it is that empty space.

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*Ha Jin*

## The Dead Soldier's Talk

*In October 1969, in a shipwreck*
*accident on the Tumen River, a young*
*Chinese soldier was drowned*
*saving a plaster statue of Chairman Mao.*
*He was awarded Merit Citation 2, and*
*was buried at a mountain foot in Hunchun*
*County, Jilin.*

I'm tired of lying here.
The mountain and the river are not bad.
Sometimes a bear, a boar, or a deer
comes to this place
As if we are a group of outcast comrades.
I feel lonely and I miss home.
It is very cold when winter comes.

I saw you coming just now
Like a little cloud wandering over grassland.
I knew it must have been you,
For no other had come for six years.

Why have you brought me wine and meat
and paper-money again?
I have told you year after year
That I am not superstitious.
Have you the red treasure book with you?

I have forgotten some quotations.
You know I don't have a good memory.
Again, you left it home.

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How about the statue I saved?
Is it still in the museum?
Is our Great Leader in good health?
I wish He live ten thousand years!

Last week I dreamed of our mother
Showing my medal to a visitor.
She was still proud of her son
And kept her head up
While going to the fields.
She looked older than last year
And her grey hair troubled my eyes.
I did not see our little sister.
She must be a big girl now.
Has she got a boy friend?

Why are you crying?
Say something to me.
Do you think I cannot hear you?
In the early years
You came and stood before my tomb
Swearing to follow me as a model.
In recent years
You poured tears every time.

Damn you, why don't you open your mouth?
Something must have happened.
What? Why don't you tell me!

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# Une Petite Fumée de souvenirs

## Juliette Huxley

*Juliette Huxley was born in Neuchâtel, Switzerland, in 1896. She came to England at the age of nineteen in May 1915 to work as a French teacher. By chance her first employer was Lady Ottoline Morrell—patroness of the arts and artists, Bloomsbury hostess, and one of the most celebrated women of her time. She was successfully interviewed in the first class waiting-room at Oxford Station, and later Lady Ottoline wrote in her memoirs, "Mademoiselle Juliette Baillot came to us to be a companion and* soi-disant *governess to Julian. The first time I saw her was at Oxford Station where we sat together on a bench—a tall, slim, very pretty, shy, severe and composed Swiss girl, with plaits of fair hair done into two buns on her ears, she seemed almost absurdly young, but she herself seemed quite confident and I wanted someone young and cheerful and active for Julian. She came and was perfect . . . she took part in all our life and with her lovely simplicity and intelligence wound her way in and out of the various visitors, much liked by everybody. . . . I can never forget her lovely slim figure as she dived into the pond, her long yellow hair*

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*making her look like a water nymph or a picture of a silvery saint by Crivelli."*

*Today, at ninety, Juliette Huxley is still tall and slim, very charming, and looks uncannily youthful. Her blond hair has inevitably turned silver and frames her face in soft natural waves, but her innocent blue eyes are undimmed by age and shine with humor and wonderment. She speaks in a gentle, clear voice, with a touch of accent, and uses the occasional French word or expression.*

*Her autobiography,* Leaves From the Tulip Tree, *published in England in June, chronicles her remarkable life from her Swiss childhood, her stay at Garsington Manor, the country home of Lady Ottoline Morrell, her meeting there with Aldous and Julian Huxley, her subsequent marriage to Julian, their travels around the world—meeting with some of the most famous men and women of our times—to her becoming the doyenne of one of Britain's most distinguished intellectual families.*

*Lady Huxley lives in a pretty, late-Georgian house in Hampstead, London. It is full of the mementi of a long and fascinating life, of works of art by friends such as Henry Moore, Georges Braque, John Piper, Henry Lamb, Duncan Grant, and Julian Trevelyan. At the back of the house is the garden Juliette tends herself, where evergreen Eleagnus trees lead to a lawn bordered with rose bushes and camilias, exotic shrubs and flowers, and where one finds pieces of Juliette's own sculpture. Her two sons—Anthony Huxley, a botanist and author of some twenty-five books on plants, and Francis Huxley, a social-anthropologist and writer—and her brother-in-law Sir Andrew Huxley, a physiologist, Nobel Prize winner, and President of the Royal Society and Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, and their progeny are frequent visitors, as are old and new friends. They are all received with warmth, and regaled with delicious meals and lavish high-teas.*

*The following interview took place in the large library of her house, a room lined with books, photographs and Huxley memorabilia.*

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INTERVIEWER

You were born and brought up in Neuchâtel, Switzerland, and at an early age became interested in literature. Did you think of pursuing a literary career?

JULIETTE HUXLEY

Yes. After the *Ecole Supérieure* I very much wanted to go to the University in Geneva and study literature, but I couldn't because I had to earn my living. My father was a young lawyer, but one day his partner absconded with all the contents of the safe and suddenly we became poor. Instead of declaring himself bankrupt, my father insisted on paying back every penny of the debts. And he did. He was broken by the ordeal and died young. My mother, undaunted, turned our house into a *Pensionnat*, and took in young girls from German-Swiss and Russian families to "finish" them and teach them French. She ran our lives with Calvinistic severity and Swiss frugality. Her sister was married to a very handsome Englishman, King George V's wardrobe superintendant, and they lived at St. James's palace in London. So when I was nineteen I was sent to London to stay with them and look for a job. My aunt had been a fashionable designer and had a *salon*, where society women bought their clothes. Her husband had a staff of valets who looked after the King's wardrobe. He had to choose the various outfits for official engagements, even the jewels that the King had to give as presents to visiting foreign dignitaries. They were both very kind to me; I learned English and read a great deal.

INTERVIEWER

What books did you read in Switzerland?

HUXLEY

The French classics, especially the Romantics: Racine, Molière, Victor Hugo, Alfred de Musset, Georges Sand, Rousseau, Jules Verne, and the later poets, especially Rimbaud, for whom I developed a passion, and Marceline Desbordes-

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*Lady Ottoline Morrell at Bedford Square, 1912.*

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*Juliette Huxley, age 19, at Garsington.*

Valmore, and of course lesser authors who have now been completely forgotten.

INTERVIEWER

You struck gold with your first job interview. Did you know who Lady Ottoline Morrell was?

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HUXLEY

Not at all. But I was struck by her unusual beauty—dark blue eyes, Titian red hair, tall statuesque figure and regal manners. I never saw her flustered or rushed. She wore lovely Grecian cream crèpe-de-Chine dresses, with high waists and gold lace round the neck. I adored her completely and thought her the most perfect of women.

INTERVIEWER

What was Garsington Manor like?

HUXLEY

It was a Tudor house, with beautiful original panelings which Ottoline chose to paint: the large sitting-room in Byzantine red and gold, the adjoining room in soft turquoise green. Samarkand carpets of gold and orange hues covered the floors, and the silk taffeta curtains bordered with lace and silver bindings were works of art. I have never seen a more beautiful house. Life there was like a fairy tale, and often reminded me of *Le Grand Meaulnes*. On winter evenings we would sit by the crackling fire, embroidering a large counterpane, while Ottoline read to us aloud, and in summer there would be music and dancing on the lawn which swept down to a large pond. A magnificent old Ilex tree stood sentinel over the festivities. There was another French-speaking girl there, a Belgian war refugee whom Ottoline had taken under her powerful wings. Her name was Maria. She was very beautiful, with huge grey-green eyes and black hair. We became friends and later she married Aldous.

INTERVIEWER

Ottoline Morrell was the most famous literary hostess of her day. Who were the visitors to the house while you were there?

HUXLEY

A stream of visitors came and stayed, some for long periods to write their books or paint their pictures: Bertrand Russell, Lytton Strachey, Dora Camyher Carrington, Virginia and

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Leonard Woolf, Katherine Mansfield and Middleton Murray, Dorothy Brett, the D. H. Lawrences and Mark Gertler. . . . The house filled up on weekends. Unlike some social hostesses, who entertain artists and writers *after* they have become famous, Ottoline had a genuine appreciation of talent and spotted it long before it bore fruit. She helped to cultivate it. There was a very intelligent atmosphere—people didn't gossip much, but they spoke about the books they had read, and discussed politics, as Philip Morrell was a Member of Parliament. Bertrand Russell was the most impressive; he lived and worked in a cottage set aside from the house. In the evenings he read to us: the whole of Sainte-Beuve's *Les Causeries du Lundi* in French, which he spoke beautifully. Lytton Strachey stayed for long periods too. He read to us Pope's *The Rape of the Lock.* He gave me tuition in English Literature, from Shakespeare and Donne to the Romantics. He suggested that I learn poems by heart and I started with Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale.*

> *Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!*
> *No hungry generations tread thee down;*
> *The voice I hear this passing night was heard*
> *In ancient days by emperor and clown . . .*

and so on. Then I began to write my own poems which I had the temerity to show him! He was very kind and patient, and tried to teach me rhythm, because of course my rhythm was French. Unlike Ethel Merman, I definitely hadn't got rhythm!

INTERVIEWER

Bertrand Russell had a love affair with Ottoline. Was it going on while he lived there?

HUXLEY

No, it was over, but they remained devoted friends all their lives. When Russell was ninety I visited him at his house in Wales, and he showed me a large wooden trunk saying, "*Voilà!* That is Ottoline!" It contained all her letters, which he later disposed of to McMaster University in Ontario.

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INTERVIEWER

There were many other love affairs going on which were later recounted in novels and memoirs: Mark Gertler and Carrington, Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, Clive Bell and Mary Hutchinson. Were you aware of them?

HUXLEY

No. You see I was very young and very naive. My aunt, on the other hand, had heard that there were people who were not married but living together at Garsington. She wrote me a stern letter suggesting that I leave. I wrote back an equally forceful letter asking her to mind her own business! She took it very well and never mentioned the subject again.

INTERVIEWER

Despite her kindness and generosity, Ottoline Morrell provoked mixed feelings in her friends and protégés, some of whom wrote very unkind things about her. Is there an explanation for it?

HUXLEY

Perhaps she had what Cardinal Retz called "the deadly gift of intimacy"—she talked to people in such a way that they would open their hearts to her. Perhaps some of their secrets were divulged? Or they resented having exposed themselves? It was also partly jealousy: she was the sister of a Duke, she was rich and beautiful. I was very sad to learn later that many of those who had accepted her hospitality mocked and sneered at her behind her back. Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey would write effusive letters to her after a stay, and write the most malicious, bitchy gossip about her to each other or, in their diaries, on the same day. But she forgave them. When D. H. Lawrence caricatured her in *Women in Love* their friendship broke up. Several years later, in 1928, we spent a winter with the Lawrences in Switzerland and I asked him to write to Ottoline and make it up with her. He did, and they made peace. To me she was perfect, and when she died it was as if a light had gone out of my life.

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INTERVIEWER

When did the Huxleys come into your life?

HUXLEY

Aldous was finishing his degree at Oxford and came to Garsington for weekends. He was everybody's favorite. After he left Oxford with a brilliant double first, he worked on the farm at Garsington, as he was not eligible for active war service. We used to bicycle together and became close friends. We discussed books, in particular William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience.* On summer evenings we would sit on the roof and watch the moon rise over the surrounding countryside. He told me about his brothers: Trev who had committed suicide, and Julian who was a scientist and a professor at Rice University in Texas. Then in 1916 Julian came back to England to go to war, and came to Garsington. Later he wrote to me from the front asking me for help. He told me that despite his apparent ebullience and gaiety he suffered from severe bouts of depression which made him helpless. I was flattered and responded. After the war we married and Aldous married Maria. Ottoline was very pleased and helped and guided us in every way.

INTERVIEWER

Were you conscious at the time of the privileged circle you were marrying into?

HUXLEY

Very much so. On his mother's side Julian was an Arnold—Matthew Arnold was a great-uncle, and somehow the Huxleys were related to other famous intellectual families—the Darwins, the Peases, the Trevelyans—and of course they were the grandsons of the great Victorian scientist T. H. Huxley. I was overwhelmed, but as I said, Ottoline encouraged and sustained me all along. The family was upset that *both* their golden boys should marry "foreigners" but in the end they accepted us. Julian's first breakdown came just after our honeymoon and devastated me. Somehow I thought it was my fault.

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We spent some time in Switzerland and when we came back he had recovered—for the next twenty-five years there was no relapse, and he wrote some of his important scientific books.

INTERVIEWER

After your wedding you went to live at Oxford where Julian became a don of New College and taught. Did you make a whole new set of friends?

HUXLEY

At first I didn't know anyone, except for Julian's students and fellow dons, all interesting and bright. In those days people called on each other, wearing white gloves and leaving visiting cards. Married women had to chaperone young girls at balls and tea parties. I had to do all those kinds of things. We became friends with Jack Haldane, the famous geneticist. He was well-known for his work on Mendelism and because he was a communist. He was a gentle and kind man, though he appeared uncouth and gruff. He would drop in for tea and start reciting reams of poetry, the whole of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. If ever he dried on a word, he would beat his brow and say: "Oh my God! What have you done with my poor memory!" Or he would telephone the house and our maid Mary would answer. The short conversation would go as follows:

*Haldane*—Who is that?
*Mary*—I am Mary, sir.
*Haldane*—Which one? Bloody or Virgin?

We also saw a good deal of the warden of New College, the famous Reverend Spooner, inventor of Spoonerisms. He had a thin, sharp voice and would say: "Mrs. Spooner and I went to Egypt and saw the Minx by Spoonlight" (The Sphinx by moonlight); or to a naughty student: "You will go down by town drain!" (go to town by train), "erotic blacks" (erratic blocks), and endless other examples like those, mostly invented by other people. Our other friends, those days in London, were the novelist Rosamond Lehmann, and later Sybille

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Bedford, who wrote the two-volume biography of Aldous after his death. Both are still dear friends.

INTERVIEWER

In 1924 you came back to London and Julian became Professor of Zoology at King's College. Is that when you met H. G. Wells and Julian began working with him?

HUXLEY

Yes. Wells had just published his *Outline of History* and was basking in a radiant reputation. We often stayed with him and his patient, sweet wife Jane at their house in Kent. He and Julian gave full rein to their intellectual fencing and collaborated on the very popular *Science of Life* series, which was designed to bring science to the ordinary man. Later they were collected in three large volumes. We also stayed at his house in the south of France where he lived with his mistress Odette Keun, for all the world as if his wife didn't exist. At the same time he kept a couple of affairs going in London for good measure! Odette Keun was a very interesting woman: she had been a nun and expelled from the convent because she had frightened the Father Confessor with accounts of her sexual fantasies! She and H. G. often quarreled and she would call him "*Sale petit calico*," the dirty little draper, because H. G. had started life in a draper's shop; later they would make up as though nothing had ever happened! I'm afraid H. G. Wells didn't set a good example and his influence led to what in the book I have called Julian's "*Fugue*," the escapade: Julian fell in love with a charming American girl on a boat, between Marseilles and Port Said to be exact, and told me that he intended to have an affair with her. But I was no Mrs. Wells, and couldn't accept such an arrangement. We went through two years of hell, with frequent partings and reunions, as Julian kept going back and forth to America—what the French call "*un mauvais quart d'heure*." Finally Julian decided to break up the relationship and stay with the family. But marriages often go through stormy patches in mid-life. Nowadays couples seem too trigger-happy with divorce, to the detriment of their

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children who suffer terribly even if they don't show it. It is better to weather the storm and come out of it stronger. But then life is so much more difficult for the young today, with all the pressures and threats of the modern world.

INTERVIEWER

Did you break your friendship with H. G. Wells because of that episode?

HUXLEY

No. I stayed friends with him till the end of his life. But he broke with Julian over a slight matter: Julian cut his speech short at a conference and he never forgave him. Yet he had always been ruthless with *his* editing of Julian's material. For example, Julian wrote an article on ants for the *Science of Life* series and H. G. cut it down to a tenth of its length, saying, "We don't want ants crawling all over the page!"

INTERVIEWER

At the time you also became great friends with D. H. Lawrence and his wife Frieda. How did that develop?

HUXLEY

Lawrence had few male friends, but Aldous was certainly one of them. In the winter of 1928, we took a chalet in Les Diablerets, in Switzerland, with Aldous and Maria, and the Lawrences took a smaller one next door. We met every day for tea, and went for long walks in the snow. Lawrence argued with Julian about the theory of evolution which he rejected instinctively and categorically: "God created the world as it is and that is that!" he would say. After a while Julian and Aldous gave up trying to persuade him. Lawrence and Aldous talked about literature a great deal. He told Aldous that he should write about better, nicer women and men. Aldous's women were nearly always hard and scheming, and his attitude was rather misanthropic. Lawrence thought that human beings were better than that, or could be. This influenced Al-

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*Madame Baillot (Juliette's mother), Frieda and D. H. Lawrence, and Anthony Huxley, in Switzerland in 1928.*

dous greatly, and he did improve his women characters in his later novels.

INTERVIEWER

In the thirties, Julian became the director of the Zoo in Lon-

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*Aldous and Maria Huxley in Switzerland in 1929.*

don. How did you like living above the shop, so to speak, in an apartment in the Zoo?

HUXLEY

We loved it! We got used to hearing the lions roar at night and the monkeys shriek. We also had a camp at Whipsnade Zoo, at first a haystack in the middle of a field, then a couple of shacks which we arranged. We spent the summer weekends there with friends, sleeping in the hay, devoured by harvest

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bugs. We rode ponies at night to see the animals prowling in their enclosures, the big cats with their red eyes shining like torches in the dark. It was magical, like living in the Garden of Eden.

INTERVIEWER

That was the time when you discovered a new talent—sculpture. How did that happen?

HUXLEY

By a curious accident in 1934, my son Anthony, aged twelve, was knocked off his bicycle by a passing car, and suffered a concussion. He had to leave school for a term, and to entertain him I began to make things with him, such as playing with clay. To my surprise I found myself enjoying modeling enormously. I did a striking portrait of a friend who kindly sat for me. Anthony recovered, mercifully, and I joined the Central School of Arts and learned sculpture under John Skeaping, a well-known sculptor and teacher. I carved in wood and chalk collected from the bottom of chalk cliffs in Dorset and made some quite creditable pieces. The large Red River hog you see behind you even got into the Royal Academy Show after the war; those hands in oak on the shelf and the few of the pieces in the garden are about all that is left of my work here; the rest was given to my sons and friends. Henry Moore was, among others, very encouraging.

Years ago I had bought a Henry Moore shelter drawing which I cherished. But a few years ago, I had to sell it. So with great sadness I rang him up and said: "I'm sorry Henry, I had to sell your picture." "I know," he replied, "I bought it." I was glad that it went to his own collection.

INTERVIEWER

Immediately after the war Julian became the first Director General of UNESCO, which he had helped to create. You went to live in Paris and met a whole set of new people. Did it help to be French-speaking?

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*Julian Huxley as Director of the London Zoo, 1936–43.*

HUXLEY

Very much. In France, if you speak French without a foreign accent you are accepted as French—although I was Swiss. But *quelles shambles*! There was nowhere to live and we put up at an hotel. Then Mini Gielgud (sister-in-law of Sir John Gielgud) rescued us in her large comfortable apartment. She had tame mice and I remember meeting Josephine Baker at her house, with her hair wrapped in a turban and two mice running in and out of it all over her head, their eyes sparkling like little rubies. I went to fashion shows and bought designer clothes, as social life in France is much more formal than in England. At the center of that social life were Lady Diana Cooper and her husband Duff, then the British Ambassador. We met a number of French celebrities—André Malraux, Louise de Vilmorin, the poet Aragon and his wife Elsa Triolet, the sculptor Brancusi, and others. Julian was lionized every-

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where on account of his energetic and idealistic championship of UNESCO as well as his own scientific achievements. I remember once at a reception seeing a woman wearing pearls as large as pieces of gravel. Someone admired them and asked where they came from. "*Oh, des restes!*" she said—just leftovers! Eventually I got tired of the formality and wrote to a friend in London that the more I lived among these "foreigners," the more I appreciated and loved the English. And I still do.

INTERVIEWER

Back in England in the fifties Julian retired and was knighted. You began to travel extensively in America, Asia and Africa. Were they working trips?

HUXLEY

Mostly on behalf of UNESCO. Or giving lectures. In East Africa Julian was one of the founders establishing National Parks and Conservation schemes.

INTERVIEWER

It was after a trip to East Africa that you wrote your first book: *Wild Lives of Africa.* It was highly praised for its poetic language and original style, as well as its acute observation and sympathy for the land and its people. Were you not tempted to carry on and write more books?

HUXLEY

I wanted to do nothing else from then on. But Julian had another severe breakdown and I felt it was my duty to look after him. He got well again and wrote his memoirs, which I had to help him with. He died ten years ago at the age of eighty-seven. I went to pieces for four years, then I began to sort out his papers. I put the letters in order and sold them to Rice University together with his scientific books. Then I decided to use the money to set up a Julian Huxley Scholarship at Balliol, his old college at Oxford. But Balliol told me that there were enough scholarships already, and that it would be better

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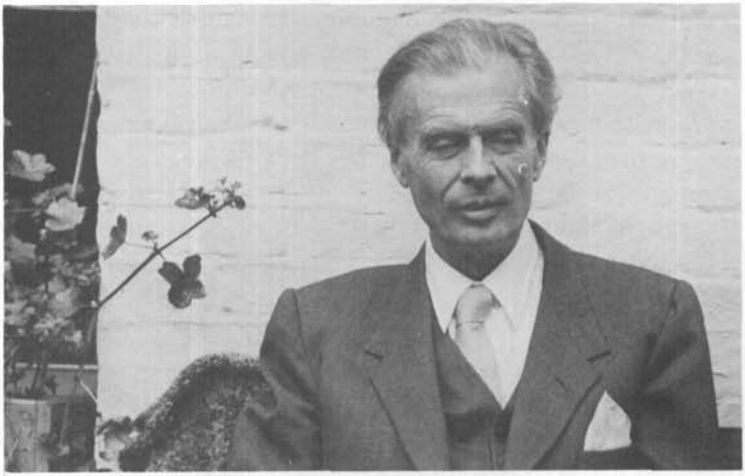

*Aldous Huxley in Juliette's garden in Hampstead in the fifties.*

*Maria Huxley.*

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*Julian and Juliette in the garden in the sixties.*

to have a research fellowship in a subject which was very important to Julian—evolutionary studies. I accepted, little realizing that it meant finding another £100,000. *Mon Dieu*! Where to get it? We set up a committee with Andrew Huxley, David Attenborough, and others, and wrote to everyone likely to contribute. It took a long time but eventually the money was found and the fellowship established. There is still a lot

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to do—all those drawers are full of letters and papers. The other day I found a letter written by the great T. H. Huxley, in which he speaks about *his* depression, and how he depends entirely on *his* wife to make the decisions!

INTERVIEWER

Julian Huxley was an agnostic, not to say an atheist, and you yourself have said that you do not believe in organized religion. What are your religious beliefs, if any, and do you believe in an afterlife?

HUXLEY

I am not so sure that Julian was as irreligious as it is commonly believed. I think that both he and Aldous had a mystical temperament. That is why Julian was so interested in Teilhard de Chardin. As for me, I believe in Jesus Christ the Son of Man, and I believe in a life force which is in the living—you can call it God if you wish. But alas, unlike my friend Rosamond Lehmann, I do not believe in an afterlife. How can you see without eyes, or hear without ears? I think about death every day. The important thing is to be ready, as Hamlet says, and not to leave loose ends, a burden for others. But what is left after the flame of life has burnt out, except perhaps memories—*une petite fumée de souvenirs*?

—**Shusha Guppy**

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*James Reidel*

## The Prince of Dark Bodies

*for S.D.S.*

The whale eye of the sun in the thin gray overcast,
walleye of a gray wall of animal
washed ashore
if you had a child's bone to hold & wish upon.

I wanted to lean on the wall & stare into that wall.

I would fall not in a dream & that is a disgrace.

To fall on the wayside where the Good Samaritan hides
behind a rock. There is his scar
you see first when he turns you over
with the toe of his hobnail boot, the scar on his face
where his master *meted out punishment.*

The sight of it has *robbed me of my tongue.*

The names of my loved ones on *the tip of my tongue.*

I want to talk  but he talks,
"Keep your arms inside the stretcher."
Its blanket between me & the cold
blur of winter's sun smells
of cedar.
The first smell
the pharoah breathes deeply
as he slips off his golden mask.

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*Daniel Wolff*

We're a false color, a fickle color, whatever color will do.
Point us at a sunset,
and we golden. Open us to the world, and we blue.
We are what we reflect.

Pressed against this painted wood,
I scrape it down to shades of whiteness.
Henry says that it's like a Conscience.
And I think that if I understood

just that, I might—through repetition—
so determine my life's direction
that certain feelings would fail
to feel—that I could force the Past to pale—

and make myself, if not New,
then ready for the new: rid of you.

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*Ann Snodgrass*

## Portal

It could happen again. It will.
But this time the geography will be more final,
more certain of the rain and its echo
of something inexplicably sad:
your face drenched in the almost coastal
light of a long and regrettable seclusion.
Not that the grotto will be missing
its idol, for the poor women
will always go there to pray, but that time
may have masked the entrance with vines.
And yet, even apart we were always inside
a continental silence that seemed gorged
with jungles of pleasure. Certainly
we couldn't turn from it without pain.
And why take the narrow mountain pass
when the village lights below are guilty
of a paralyzing beauty? Blessings
have never seemed closer
to malevolent spells, or the waves more
insistent on darkly giving. And not sometimes,
but always, we are still surprised
by what the undertow, our benefactor, conjures.

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*Alberto Ríos*

## Horses, Which Do Not Exist

The strong horseshoe shape of a horse's mouth
Of his teeth, set that way of a suitcase handle

And the way a bit, in just that way, pulls him:
Come here to where it is I say. Like that

A horse's mouth, and so his manner, broken
Those horses no longer running along the far

Distance visible from a Tucson highway thirsty
Stopping for water, making one of those paintings

Living rooms wear as pendants. Those paintings
Too unreal, laughed at and finger-poked

And so these horses too must be unreal,
A bad painting of nine,

A pond of browning water. Birds, two kinds.
Grass too green—spring has come this year,

And water—mountains too blue, too many shades,
In the distance. And so they are, this all is,

As children say, like a dream,
Laughing hard at how good it seemed at the moment.

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*Alice Rose George*

## Success

Somehow the days take care of themselves.
Desire that feels as if it will scorch
The skin of wanting doesn't get fulfilled
And somehow we don't die—though we want to.
We have learned to dwell on the world condition,
To have consciousness even as we rape the child
Of any decent future—and this isn't just pessimism
talking.
These are long, hard days we spend breathing
With an unnatural knowledge of what is meant by the
word
Aloneness. The collective we is friends obsessed
With busy routines, the electing body, family unseen
For years, identities broken, the chain broken,
Words breaking our hearts, but then we straighten up
And go on pretending it never happened, we are so
strong.
Irony, cynicism, gossip are appropriate, they fit
Our times—the spread out page of a newspaper
Telling us what we are better than a real God,
Who can't talk, ever could. We find
Ourselves over Sunday brunch bad mouthing
Our very sadness so that even the sun loses validity,
Proof of our days is invalid, but we talk on as though
Some answer were kicking under the dining room table.
If not a meal, then a party where drunks can let down
their hair,

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Be natural with pain that comes up like vomit,
No longer thinking control; the desire to be loved,
So unnatural for our world, dances like a whore
Before our eyes, in us, ashamed we go home
Alone, naked for the stars only.
The only way to survive is to act—so,
Days fly by with their demands and only a few moments
Of desire and despair slip past the censors
And they don't kill us—yet.
We are ok, we are concerned, we reassure one another.

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*Carmine F. Chickadel*

## Tangles

Clouds scuffle and clinch in this March sky;
wind presses our turned collars to chin
and Chris casts his line against the grain.
The lure hangs on the peak of a gust;
monofilament esses back and erupts
on the spool into loops and hitches.
*A blue gill worries my bait; then,*
"Dad, I'm stuck; strings are everywhere."
I lose my fish and my calm. My son
offers me a labyrinth to unweave.
Numb fingered, I poke at his bristly maze.
I think of how my father looked, black as burning,
and waited through my own lapped coils.
I smooth my face, unkink my forehead
and know I can't pull these knots undone.

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*Michael Finley*

## A Drive in the Country

Summer was dry
but the farmers forget
and plow the dead stalks under.
Today the wind is lifting
the first loose dirt away.
The elms in the Mahnomen park
are striped for felling,
and sugar beets litter
the road at sharp curves.
Tree trunks lay scattered
where they landed after
the tornado of 1958.
Outside Crookston a yellow dog
just made it to the ditch
to die, and farther ahead,
a mile from the border,
old shoes line the shoulders.
Canadians are home now,
wearing new ones.

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*James Cole*

## Glimpse from the Classroom

A fire truck goes by,
  On its way to the station
With a low roar,
  Followed by one of the Nigerians
In a dented car.
  What but the autumn leaves
Could be more academic?

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*Donald Platt*

## How Night Comes

First we lose our shadows
walking together into the veiled fields
of shade tobacco.
Mountains are farther away,
the farmhouses whiter,
last light clotting their weathered boards.
Moon is a knothole in the grain of the sky.
Cottonwood fluff floats down to us,
the milky way going to seed.

We lose track of our feet
and have to go by touch alone,
warm dirt between my crooked toes.
Your fingertips are minnows
nibbling the collarbone.
Haystacks soften.
We are losing the plowed fields,
the road winding straight
into the alfalfa.
We are walking on the voices of crickets.
I touch the scars on your forehead
that darkness heals,
our bodies made whole again.
They have their own light.
We lie down in a drying shed
among cut sheaths of green tobacco,
their smell humid and close.
Putting your rough tongue
in my ear, you whisper to the night
around us like a halo
to take you slow.

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*Claude Pelieu*

## Mary's Latest Paintings

At first sight muffled silence
at first sight the immanence of night
at first sight colors advance
at first sight water-flowers droop
at first sight all logic withers
at first sight you see and hear
at first sight you forget everything
at first sight you start to dream
at first sight charred forests
at first sight all the fragrances of the earth
at first sight nebulae
at first sight flooded in rain and sunlight
at first sight bloodless wind
at first sight devastated lands
at first sight the rose stripped of dreams
at first sight I don't know what I'm hearing
at first sight I don't know what I'm seeing
at first sight it's a reality sandwich
at first sight lacerated poetry
at first sight it's chock-a-block full
at first sight it's the four seasons
at first sight it's this and that
at first sight it's surrounded with foam and gas
at first sight rocks heave
at first sight a blueish equinox
at first sight a hole in the mist
at first sight every image is presented
at first sight the eye escapes
at first sight the last "reefer"
at first sight light breathes
at first sight in the hollow of summer

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at first sight a forget-me-not and true solitude
at first sight the world such as it is
at first sight a world such as it ain't
at first sight reaching the sky
at first sight a desert island
at first sight a cataclysm
at first sight all the voices
at first sight the world's song
at first sight and then nothing
at first sight the shadows' great wind
at first sight dawn's disorder
at first sight clean and jerk
at first sight raga-tantra
at first sight everything brimming with silence
at first sight a rich and good painting
at first sight while repainting the sky and the night

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# NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

## FICTION

**W. S. Merwin's** many books of poetry, prose, and translations, include *The Lice*, *The Miner's Pale Children*, *Opening the Hand*, and *Life of Lazarillo de Tormes: His Fortunes & Adversities*. His next collection, *The Rain in The Trees*, will be published by Atheneum this spring.

## POETRY

**John Ash** has published two volumes of poetry, *The Goodbyes* (Carcanet, 1982) and *The Branching Stairs* (Carcanet, 1985). He was born in England and currently resides in New York. He received an Ingram Merrill fellowship in 1985. Carcanet will publish his next collection, *Disbelief*, in the fall of 1987.

**Christopher Benfey** is the author of *Emily Dickinson and the Problem of Others* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1984). He is on the staff of *The New York Review of Books*.

**April Bernard's** poems have appeared in *The New York Review of Books*, *Bomb*, and *Parnassus*. "The Way We Live Now" is the title poem of her first, unpublished collection. She lives in New York City, where she works as a magazine editor and writer.

**Carmine Chickadel** has received a Fellowship in Poetry from the Delaware State Arts Council and a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship. He teaches high school in Delaware and is part of the Artist-in-Education Program for the state.

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**James Cole's** poems have appeared in many periodicals in England, Ireland and in the U.S., most recently in *Poetry*. He teaches at the University of Wyoming.

**Alfred Corn** was awarded the American Academy of Arts and Letters Special Award for his most recent book of poetry, *Notes From a Child of Paradise* (Viking, 1984). His other collections are *All Roads at Once* (1976), *A Call in the Midst of the Crowd* (1978), and *The Various Light* (1980). *The Metamorphosis of Metaphor*, a collection of essays, will be published this spring by Viking.

**Michael Finley's** most recent book of poems is *Water Hills* (Salt House Press, 1986). He lives in St. Paul, where he runs a small copywriting business.

**Alice Rose George** was born and raised in Mississippi and has lived for twenty years in New York, where she is a photo editor. Her poems have appeared in *The New England Review.*

**Jorie Graham** is currently teaching at the University of Iowa. Her new collection of poems, *The End of Beauty*, will be published by Ecco Press in April, 1987.

**Linda Gregg** is the author of the poetry collections *Too Bright to See* and *Alma* (Random House, 1986). She was a recipient of a 1985 Whiting Foundation Award.

**Eamon Grennan** teaches in the English Department at Vassar College. His work has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Ontario Review*, *The New Yorker*, and in various Irish magazines. His collection of poems, *Wildly For Days*, was published by Gallery Press of Dublin in 1983.

**Jane Hirshfield's** work has appeared in *The American Poetry Review*, *The New Yorker*, *The Antioch Review*, and elsewhere. Her first collection, *Alaya*, won the Quarterly Review of Literature Poetry Prize in 1982. She recently received a Guggenheim Fellowship.

**John Jackson** is an advertising copywriter in Royal Oak, Michigan. This is his first publication.

**Ha Jin** is the pen-name of Jin Xuefei, who is a graduate student from mainland China at Brandeis University. This is his first American publication.

**William Logan's** second book, *Difficulty*, was published by Godine in 1985. He has recently returned from a year in England.

**Eugenio Montale** (1896–1981) was a Nobel Prize-winning poet. **William Arrowsmith's** most recent books are his translations of Montale's *The Storm And Other Things* (Norton, 1986), and *The Occasions* (Norton, 1987). He is a professor of Classics at Boston University and general editor of *The Greek Tragedy in New Translation.* He has received a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship in the Humanities, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and the Prix de Rome.

**Robert Morgan** has published five books of poetry; his sixth, *At The Edge of the Orchard Country*, will be out from Wesleyan University Press in early 1987. This year he received fellowships from The New York Foundation for the Arts and from the International Writers Retreat at Hawthornden Castle

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in Scotland. He teaches at Cornell University where he is the acting chairman of the English Department.

**Howard Nemerov** has published numerous books of poetry, as well as novels, stories, and essays. His most recent are *Inside the Onion*, a volume of poetry, and *New and Selected Essays. War Stories: Poems About Long Ago* will be published by the University of Chicago Press this year.

**Charles North** has published four volumes of poetry, the most recent being *Leap Year* (Kulchur Foundation, 1978). He has been the recipient of an NEA Fellowship and a Poets Foundation Award. He lives in New York.

**Sharon Olds** currently teaches at Brandeis University and at the Goldwater Hospital on Roosevelt Island. Her third book of poems, *The Gold Cell*, will be published by Knopf in January, 1987.

**Claude Pelieu** is a poet, painter and collagist. He was born in France and has lived in the United States since 1963. He has published twenty books of poetry and prose in France; his most recent poetry collection, *Indigo Express*, was published in Paris in September, 1986, by Le Livre à Venir. With his wife, Mary Beach, he has translated works by Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs and Lawrence Ferlinghetti.

**Donald Platt** graduated from Hampshire College in 1985 and is now a student in the MFA program at the University of Virginia. This is his first publication.

**Bin Ramke** is the director of the creative writing program at the University of Denver, and editor of the Contemporary Poetry Series for the University of Georgia Press. "A Father Failing" is from *The Language Student* (LSU Press).

**James Reidel** studied at Columbia and Rutgers. His poems have appeared recently in *Conjunctions* and *Ploughshares*.

**Alberto Ríos** has just published *Five Indiscretions* (Sheep Meadow Press). He won the 1981 Walt Whitman Award for his first book of poems, *Whispering to Fool the Wind*, and the Western States Book Award in Fiction for a collection of stories, *The Iguana Killer*. He is currently an associate professor at Arizona State University.

**Jennifer Rose** lives in Waltham, Massachusetts and works as a typographer. She was a Discovery/*The Nation* winner.

**James Schuyler**'s fifth book of poems, *A Few Days*, was published in 1986 by Random House. His previous book, *The Morning of the Poem*, won the 1981 Pulitzer Prize.

**Delmore Schwartz** (1913–66) was a celebrated American poet, fiction writer, and critic. **Robert Phillips**, a special consultant to *The Paris Review*, is Delmore Schwartz's literary executor and the editor of his posthumous books: *Last and Lost Poems* (1979), *Letters of Delmore Schwartz* (1985), and *The Ego is Always at the Wheel* (1986).

**Ann Snodgrass** is a teaching fellow at the University of Utah. Her poems have appeared in *Black Warrior Review*, *The Sonora Review*, *The Antioch Review*, and *Telescope*.

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**Gerald Stern** will publish a new collection, *Lovesick*, in the spring of 1987 with Harper and Row. His two previous books of poetry are *Paradise Poems* (Random House, 1984) and *Rejoicings* (Metro, 1984).
**Derek Walcott** is the subject of an interview, "The Art of Poetry XXXVII" which appears in this issue.
**Daniel Wolff's** poems, from his collection *Work Sonnets*, have been published in *Grand Street*, *Shenandoah*, *Threepenny Review*, and *Partisan Review*, among others.

## FEATURE

**Shusha Guppy** is the London Editor of *The Paris Review*, and a regular contributor to the *Daily Telegraph*, British *Vogue*, and other periodicals.

## INTERVIEWS

**Edward Hirsch** is the author of two books of poetry, *For the Sleepwalkers* (Knopf, 1981), and *Wild Gratitude*, which Knopf published in spring, 1986.

**Jim Powell** is the recipient of a General Electric/CCLM Younger Writers Award for his poems which appeared in issue 97 of *The Paris Review*.

**John Koethe** is the winner of the 1986 Bernard F. Conners Prize for his long poem "Mistral," which will appear in the next issue of The Paris Review.

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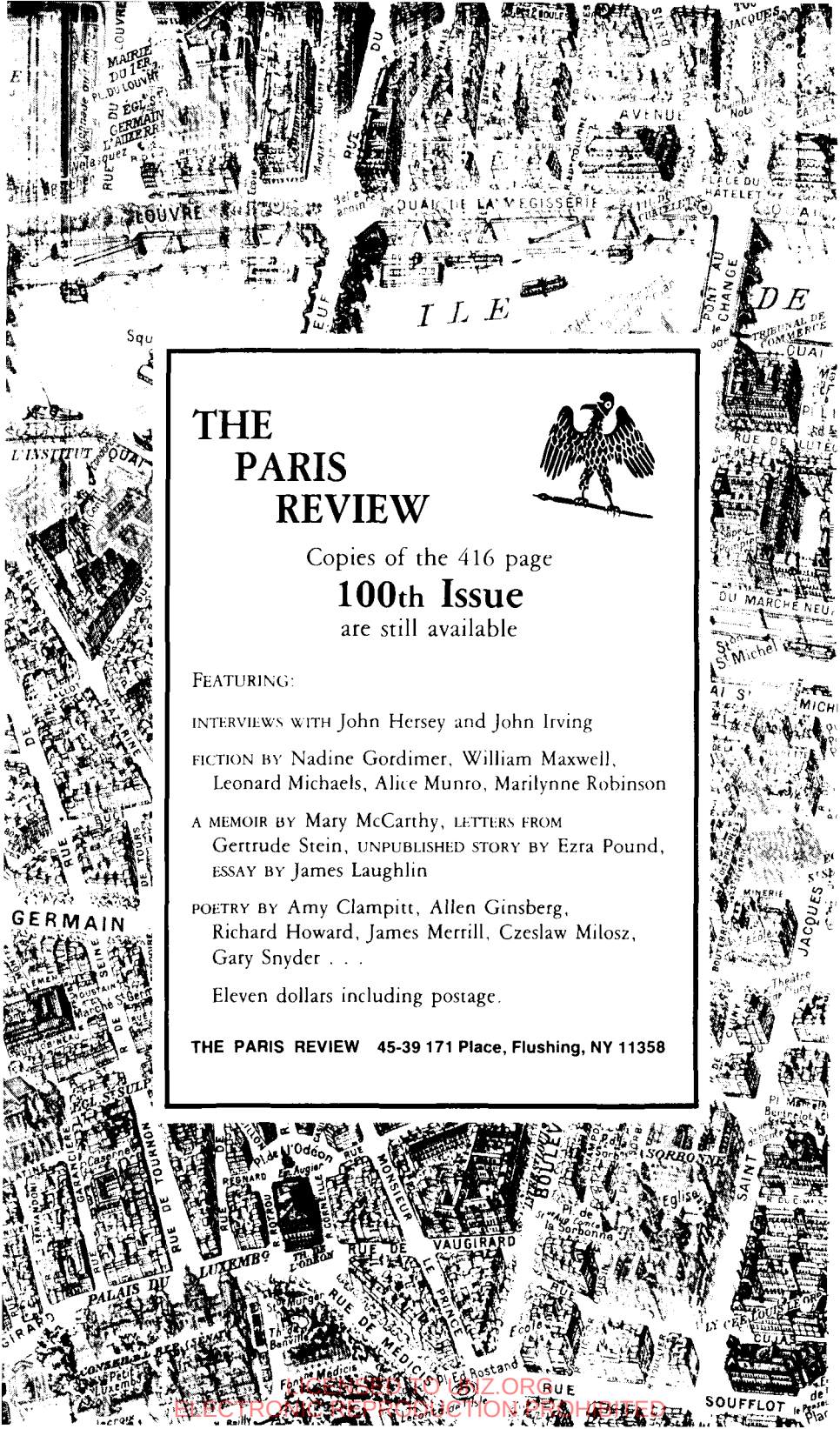

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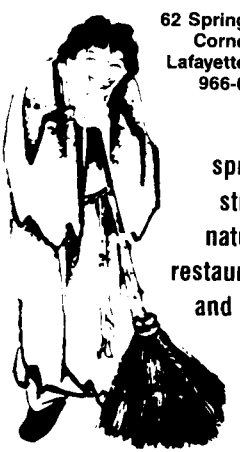

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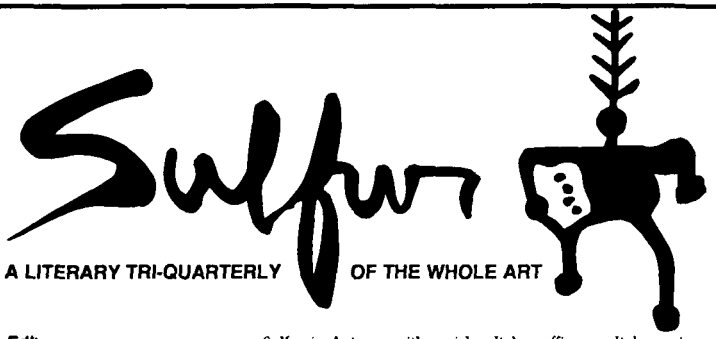


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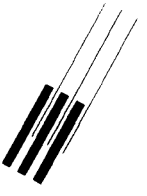

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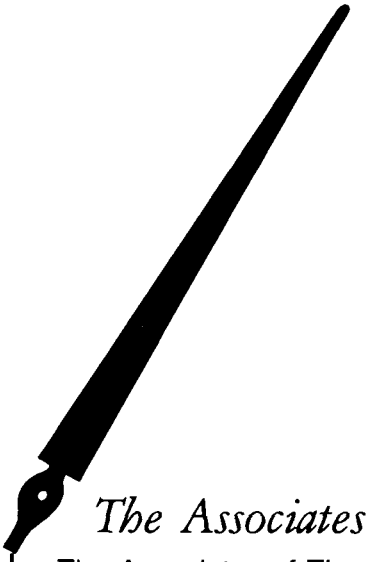

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